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Wellborn The UPPER-CRUST DETECTIVE



OR,

Playing for the Challoner Millions.

A Tale of Detective Work among
the Four Hundred.

BY JACKSON KNOX,
(OLD HAWK.)

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HURRICANE DETECTIVE," "THE CIRCUS
DETECTIVE," "OLD GRIP," "THE
HARBOR DETECTIVE," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

AT THE MASKED BALL.

"He looked like the devil, but he danced like
an angel."

Such was the general comment upon a certain
character more or less prominent among the
multitudinous maskers at the annual ball of the
Arion Society, which was given at the Metro-
politan Opera House not a great while ago.

"There he trips again, Ran!" whispered a
tall, nobly-formed girl in the character of a
shepherdess to her partner, a cavalier in white

"MARK WELLBORN!" HE FALTERED, "THE DETECTIVE! GOOD LORD! WHAT CAN
THIS MEAN?"

and gold. "Was ever such a waltzer? Who can he be?"

The pair had momentarily slipped aside out of the vortex of the mad waltz that was eddying and whirling its course to the crash of the music and amid the glory of the lights—a kaleidoscopic scene of human color, festivity and folly.

"Nonsense, Gladys!" was the cavalier's good-humoredly pettish response. "A fair dancer, to be sure; but, what matters it who or what he is?"

"Fair? he is simply divine! And somehow I feel that he is like us, Ran—more or less out of place at such a promiscuous ball as this, and only here on a sort of lark. Ah! there he whirls again, and this time with that little Swiss peasant. What movement, what grace! Dear me! he seems to be a sort of privileged character, who snatches up partner after partner just as if—"

"The devil is always a privileged character, Glad," interrupted her cavalier, with a laugh. "Come! that is, if you are breathed again."

She quickly responded, and again they swung into the giddy whirl of the dance.

They were brother and sister, Randolph and Gladys Challoner, of the best of New York's upper-crust society, if not of the select Four Hundred themselves.

In the mean time, the dancer who had so arrested their attention—a slender, singularly graceful man in the proverbial Mephistophelean costume—had slipped out of the whirl as they slipped back into it, and was now regarding the youthful pair askance, with no less interest than had been manifested in himself, whenever he could glimpse them distinguishingly from among the hundreds of gay couples that made up the Terpsichorean maze.

He had dropped his last partner as summarily as he had snatched her up, in the privilege of the masquerade, and was now partly concealed by a red and black domino which had been supplied him by an attendant at one of the stage-wings forming a part of the boundary of the immense dancing-floor.

Then his keen eyes, which fairly glittered through the eyelets of his half-mask, roved searchingly amid the brilliant and mobile throng till they rested upon two men in blue dominoes who were standing apart from the dancers at the opposite wing, apparently conversing together in low, earnest tones, while anxiously scanning the moving maze with eager and inquiring looks.

"Ha!" muttered the Mephistopheles; "the British hawk already on the the lookout for the American dove? We shall see."

Again seizing a partner—this time a fair Gypsy—he was once more spinning, and undulating through the waltz.

Separating from his unknown partner after making about half the circuit of the immense floor, in another moment he was leaning with apparent listlessness against the scenic projection on the other side of which the blue dominoes were whispering together, and not a word of whose conversation escaped him.

The listener had before this thoroughly identified the pair in his own mind as Lord Lionel Tressillian, titled English adventurer, and one, the Hon. H. Peyton Weymouth, his inseparable companion, and a more elderly swell.

"The deuce!" growled out the first named, with an impatient oath; "cawn't you see them yet, you know?"

"Not yet, Tressy, my dear," was the drawled reply. "Who the deuce could in such a blowed mob, you know? Gad! the proverbial needle in the bottle of hay would be omnipresent in comparison."

"Humph! but fortunately it is still early. And they *must* be here, for I had it on the best authority that they were coming, together with the characters they would assume."

"Patience, then, my lord. By the way, who was your authority?"

"Young Challoner's valet, as a matter of course. You know he was my man before I went broke at the last Derby. Don't relinquish your vigilance, my boy."

"I am all eyes. And you are sure about the costumes?"

"Absolutely. The girl as a shepherdess, her pastoral crook trimmed with red and blue ribbons; her brother a cavalier in white and gold—the character which I have counterparted in my own costume so perfectly."

"Now as to our plot, then—for I doubt not we shall find them presently. I'm to fill the youth with champagne in the wine-room as a starter, eh?"

"Yes, yes; while I step out of this domino and into his shoes at the fair sister's side. Why go over all this again?"

"To make sure. And you think you can carry out the entire deception as to voice, demeanor—everything?"

"Of course, of course!"

"And under what excuse can you get her to accompany you to the Red House?"

"Her brother must have told her of his larks there, and won't I be her brother for the time being? Trust her woman's curiosity for the rest."

"And there you will have the pardon on hand?"

"He will be there. Oh, it will work, my boy! Apart from my belief that I am already not displeasing in her sight, I shall present to her the alternative at once on dropping my mask: 'Marry me on the spot, or you are hopelessly compromised!'"

"Still, these American girls are so self-reliant and spirited, you know."

"Leave that to me. Her fortune is simply indispensable to me, and her person is lovely enough in all conscience."

"Wait! Yes; there can be no doubt. There they are at last!"

"Ha! you are sure? Where?"

"Near the middle."

"I see. Good! And the waltz about over, too. Be off with you, Peyt!"

As they hurried out upon the floor the Mephistopheles whirled past them, with a fresh partner in his embrace, to take advantage of the expiring spasms of the grand waltz.

A moment later and its whirling frenzy had subsided into the promenade.

"I must speak with you both apart and this instant!" said a low but peremptory voice directly behind the brother and sister, as they were moving away.

They turned, both surprised and curious, to recognize the Mephistopheles of the occasion as the speaker.

"Who are you?" demanded Randolph Challoner, abruptly.

"Look!"

The Mephistopheles swiftly raised his mask, and lowered it again.

"Wellborn!" exclaimed both brother and sister, in astonishment.

"The same. No time is to be lost. You observe the two blue dominoes making toward us?"

"Yes."

"I must have private speech with you before they can interpose. Come!"

He hurried them away with him, winding in and out of the throng perplexingly, and finally conducted them into a small cabinet, or theatrical dressing-room, far back of the stage, carefully closing the door.

Here, without any preamble, he explained the plot that was being formed.

"This seems simply incredible!" exclaimed Randolph Challoner. "Ruined gambler as he may be, Lord Tressillian is still a gentleman and a nobleman. I cannot believe him capable of plotting such a trap for my sister's hand and fortune, without being confronted with positive proof to such effect."

"Nor I," murmured Miss Challoner.

"All right," returned Wellborn, calmly. "It is just the sort of proof I intend to furnish you this very night."

"You will do this?"

"On my word!"

"Advise us then," said Randolph. "We shall trust in you. I suppose I can answer for you, too, Gladys?"

"Yes." In a low voice, and with a tinge of color over such of her lovely face as could be seen.

"This is what you are to do then," and Wellborn's air was at once business-like and determined. "You, Miss Challoner, will remain in concealment here till your brother's return. He is about to yield to Peyton Weymouth's invitation to go to the wine-room, where he will speedily pretend to be overcome with the drugged champagne which that precious sprig of the British nobility will ply him with."

"Drugged champagne!" echoed Randolph, incredulously.

"Yes. Don't interrupt, please. On your return hither, you will at once proceed with Miss Challoner (both heavily cloaked, as a matter of course) to the Red House in Harlem. There you will order a quiet supper in a *cabinet particulier* just off the Blue Room, and patiently await developments, which will consist of the positive proofs I engage to present for your edification."

"The Red House!" exclaimed Randolph, half-aghast; while his fair companion looked up with mingled curiosity and surprise.

"Exactly," continued the Mephistophelean Wellborn, imperturbably. "You are doubtless sufficiently familiar with the Master of Ceremonies there to effect what I have advised without any trouble?"

"Oh, yes, as to that; but—"

"Remember that you have promised to follow my advice. Now wait for me a few minutes, as it will not do to keep our English friends over long impatient."

With that, Wellborn opened a small door at the back of the dressing-room, and disappeared.

CHAPTER II.

MASKS AND MASKERS.

WHEN the masquerading Wellborn reappeared, say ten minutes later, it was under such a complete transformation of character as to fairly stagger the credulity of Randolph and Gladys Challoner.

"Come," said he, putting his wrist through the young man's arm with a light laugh from underneath the new mask with which he had provided himself. "I must put you in train at

once, my friend. Miss Challoner, you will remain here until your brother's return?"

The young lady could only bow dumbly in the affirmative. Was this really her former beau, Mark Wellborn, who was thus addressing her? or was it her own double, to the smallest minutiae of her shepherdess costume, her every feature of pose and bearing, and even to the perfect counterfeiting of her own voice?

Before she could quite recover from her bewilderment, the two young men had quitted the cabinet.

"Poor Mark!" murmured the young girl, locking the door behind them for her greater security, and then sinking into a seat. "Is this, then, his sole recourse since the loss of his fortune caused grandpapa to deny him my society so brutally?—a high society detective by profession! I wonder if he deems me as sordid and heartless as the rest? Heighho!" And her soft cheek sunk upon her hand in a troubled reverie as she anxiously awaited the development of the promised adventure.

In the mean time, Randolph Challoner, still with his fair shepherdess on his arm, to all appearances, had hardly returned to the dancing floor, where a mazurka was about starting up, when the pair were eagerly approached by Peyton Weymouth, who, having flung aside his blue domino, was now tricked out in all the bravery of a Charles II. courtier.

"Masks and maskers," said the new-comer, gayly. "I know you both!" And he straightway called them by name.

"Ah, Weymouth, and you yourself are no better a counterfeiter than we," cried Randolph, in reply, while his companion bowed, somewhat distantly. "But why should you be the first to scatter the illusion?"

"After Miss Challoner shall have danced this mazurka with you, as is doubtless her intention," responded the Englishman, significantly, "I shall be happy to inform you—in the wine-room."

"Take him with you at once, Mr. Weymouth," interposed the pseudo Miss Challoner, laughing. "I don't care for the mazurka, save as a spectator, and will cheerfully await his return just here, when he shall take me out for the imperial waltz that follows—or *valse*, as I suppose we ought to call it nowadays, to be in good form." And with a dismissive wave of her shepherd's crook, she forthwith sunk upon a convenient sofa with a contented look.

Weymouth was at once exultant, though young Challoner assumed a well-affected air of hesitation.

"You are quite sure you won't care, Glad?" he murmured, half-aloud.

"Nonsense!" with a pleasant laugh. "You have not had a single glass of wine yet, as I know. Only be back in time for the next waltz, and I sha'n't complain."

"You have my word for your cavalier's return in good season, fair shepherdess," cried Weymouth, as he bore away his prize in triumph.

An all but uncontrollable fondness for champagne was one of Randolph Challoner's chief weaknesses, and none knew this any better than the Hon. H. Peyton Weymouth.

The latter, therefore, seemed to carry out his end of the plot in high feather. In a quarter of an hour after their entrance into the great wine-room connected with the ball, the prospective victim was apparently altogether fuddled, and hardly able to keep his equilibrium.

"Come with me, old fellow," whispered his companion, supporting him in the direction of the adjacent alcoves and cabinets. "I'll make your excuses to your sister, and a half an hour's snooze in yonder nook will set you up all right."

"That be banged!" hiccupped the other, pulling back tipsily. "More wine first, ol' fel', one more bottle!"

"Just what you shall have, and all to yourself, too. Come along! It shall be dry Sillery—the very best to sober up on, as you ought to know. Come along!"

A moment later Randolph was monarch of all he surveyed in one of the cabinets, sprawled out in an easy-chair, his hands in his pockets, his chin on his breast, a quart bottle of champagne at his elbow—to all appearances a very demoralized cavalier in white and gold, indeed.

"Fast asleep already, and good for two hours of it, at least!" chuckled the Englishman, pausing to survey his work. "Gad! who'd have thought the pinches of powder that I managed to sprinkle in his glass could have got in their work so admirably? Now for Tressillian's part with the young lady! And, if all goes well with this plot to the end, he shall reward me finely for my share in it, or I'll know the reason why." And he forthwith stole away, carefully closing the door behind him.

The cavalier, thus left to himself, suddenly straightened up, without a lingering vestige of drunkenness in his aspect, and touched a bell.

"Waiter," he blandly observed to the attendant that appeared in response to the summons, "do you want to earn five dollars?"

"O! should say O! did, your Honor!" was the rather astounded reply, in the richest of brogues, and accompanied by the broadest of Tipperary grins.

"All right; here you are," producing the money. "Now do just as I tell you."

"Yis, sir."

"Drink that bottle of wine, or as much as you can of it, without getting drunk."

"Is it in airnest ye air, sor?"

"Thoroughly so."

"Och, and thin here's to your Honor's long loife an' good health, sor! An', be dad, Oi only wish Oi could always airn melivin' so aisily and pleasantly."

The man raised the bottle to his lips, tilted back his head, and began to ingurgitate. When he set it down again it was empty.

"Anything more, your Honor?" he asked, slowly smacking his lips.

"Yes. You saw the gentleman who brought me into this cabinet?"

"Oi did, sor."

"Should he return here, inquiring for me, you are to tell him that I disposed of the bottle, and then staggered away into the open air, obviously too drunk to know my head from my heels."

"Oi'll do it, your Honor."

There was an air of sincerity in the man's unquestioning heartiness.

"Here is your money."

Randolph then hurried away to join his sister in the dressing-room, in accordance with the detective's instructions.

To return to Weymouth, he had no sooner reappeared in the ball-room than he found his precious compatriot, Lord Tressillian, anxiously awaiting him.

"Well?" demanded the latter eagerly.

"Go on with your part, Tressy," was the composed reply. "My part is done."

A few more words were exchanged, after which Lord Tressillian threw aside his domino, and stepped into view as about as perfect an imitation of Randolph Challoner in masquerade as could be imagined.

"How do I carry it off?" he asked, in a low voice.

"Capitally!" was the reply. "Put just a little less self-assertion in your walk, and then, if you are careful to keep your voice at a low pitch, even that will not betray you."

"Thanks! Take one more look, to be sure of my prototype being done for, and then be on hand with the coach."

The mazurka had closed, and the music for the succeeding imperial waltz was beginning to breathe, when the pretended shepherdess, who will be alluded to in the sex assumed for the time-being, saw the counterfeit cavalier in white and gold approaching.

"Can you forgive me for keeping you waiting so long, Glad?" he asked, in a low voice.

"Of course I can and do, Ran." She arose placing herself in position for the dance. "And you don't seem to have drank nearly so much wine as I feared you would, which is very good of you."

CHAPTER III.

THE MEMORABLE WALTZ.

THEN the brilliant waltz music burst forth, and they were swept off their feet, as it were, in the multitudinous and whirling maze of twinkling feet and undulating forms that circled in unison with its fascinating strains around the dancing floors.

Now it chanced that Lord Tressillian was even a better dancer than the young New Yorker whose character he was counterfeiting, and that, in his own character, he had danced with the real Gladys Challoner frequently at various entertainments during the foregoing winter season.

On the other hand, Wellborn, as a waltzer especially, had been for several seasons considered without a rival in New York's upper-crust social life, *as a man*, and his chief concern was now to impart as much femininity to his Terpsichorean performance as he was enabled to do with regard to the personality of the character which in other respects he was successfully assuming to the life.

It was, therefore, a strange juxtaposition of dissimulations, in which each counterfeit felt himself instinctively thrown upon his self-defense, with an equal desire to allay whatever suspicion might arise in the other's mind.

"I really can't quite understand you, Ran," murmured the shepherdess, taking up the dangerous subject first, after a few turns had been taken.

"Give me a chance to unravel myself then, my dear," was the pseudo-brother's low-voiced rejoinder.

"What is it that puzzles you?"

"Your waltzing."

"Ahem! Why, I always imagined that my style suited you."

"It always did. The mystery now is that it suits me even better than it ever did before."

"Oho! you mean that I have improved?"

"I should say so! Since your visit to the wine-room with that Mr. Weymouth, you are really the best partner I have ever had."

"That's really odd, Glad; because you can scarcely have visited the wine-room, too."

"Do you mean to assert that my waltzing was likewise in need of improvement, you wretch?"

"Hardly that, my dear. But your waltz is

certainly *different* from what I ever noticed in it before."

"Different?"

"Yes."

"For better or worse?"

"Neither."

"Then how can it be different?"

"I don't know; save perhaps that it is somehow stronger and more—more muscular, while still admirable."

She laughed the low rippling laugh, which had ever been exceedingly musical in Lord Tressillian's ears, notwithstanding that it was less her loveliness than her possessions, present and prospective, that touched his fortune-seeking heart.

"It is odd," she murmured, "that we should each have grown so enigmatical to one another, isn't it?"

"I should say so; but I'm content, if you are."

"Agreed."

And, floating on in the waltz for some time in silence, each felt in secret that a possibly threatening self-betrayal had been more or less successfully bridged.

As fraud against fraud, it was Lord Tressillian who made the next advance at conversation, and, as he was governed by an overpowering curiosity, he was especially guarded.

"By the way, Glad?" he queried.

"Well, Ranny?"

"Our Mephistopheles didn't turn up again during my brief absence in the wine-room, I suppose?"

"No."

"I haven't seen him once since he—ah!—separated from us, either."

"Neither have I."

"Odd that he should turn out to be that fellow, without our suspecting it, eh?"

"Yes; quite unexpected."

"You—you seem to have known him pretty long, Glad?"

She turned her masked glance upon him with well-affected surprise, though secretly enjoying his compulsory struggle with his own curiosity.

"Why, how strangely you talk, Ran! He's as old an acquaintance of yours as he is of mine."

"Who is?" he blurted out, uncontrollably.

How eagerly he would have mastered the identity of the Mephistopheles of the evening then and there! But she only replied, with another wondering stare:

"Why, the gentleman we are talking about, Ran! Who else?"

The fraudulent cavalier thereupon resigned the attempt with an inward groan.

And now the waltz was at its close without his having broached the subject that was to prove the touchstone of his plot for getting this supposed young heiress in his power.

"I say, Glad," he said, as the dance broke up, "don't you find the air insufferably oppressive?"

"Very."

"Shall I get you an ice?"

"You ought to know that I wouldn't eat such a thing when I am heated as I am now."

"Some wine, then?"

"Not yet, at all events."

"I have an idea, Glad. Sit down here and let me tell you of it." And he drew her down into a seat at his side, while she looked up expectant.

"Don't you find this whole thing a bore?"

"Candidly, Ran, yes," she replied, with her light laugh. "It is all very brilliant and animated, and all that, and were we here with a party of our own set, I've no doubt it would be very enjoyable. But such a promiscuous event, and so entirely out of our sphere! I haven't felt really at ease to-night. It is so unpleasant to feel that you are doing anything clandestine."

"By Jove! that is so."

"Why did you persuade me to the risk, then?"

"Well, I thought it might be a sort of new sensation for you."

"Ah, indeed! And then there is our grandfather's anger, if he should come to hear of it."

"But he won't, you know, Glad."

"Indeed, I pray not!"

"But, look here, to return to my first suggestion, Glad; you agree with me in finding it a bore?"

"Yes."

"I have a diversion to propose, then. It isn't midnight yet. We could return here afterward, you know, should you wish a last glimpse of these madcaps when the fun is even more fast and furious than now."

"What do you propose?"

"I am half-afraid to say."

"Why?"

"Well, you might consider the diversion even more outlandish than this sort of thing, you know."

"Still, let me know what you propose," quite eagerly.

"You have perhaps had some admissions from me with regard to the Red House?"

"That horrid night club-house, somewhere in Harlem, which you wicked young men attend when you want to be specially wicked?"

"Well—ur—I suppose so; though it isn't so infernally bad, you know. Of course it's a great place for all-nighters, and there's a good deal of gambling, perhaps. But then, the suppers are tip-top, a fellow can have any amount of privacy, and—and, well, you wouldn't be the first bang-up, high-toned lady to visit it on the sly—though, of course, under proper escort—by a long shot. There you are, Glad!"

"Oh, I'll risk the adventure with you, Ran!" was the composed and half-amused response. As well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb, as I have heard you sagaciously observe lots of times."

"No! Will you, though, really? Gad! it's more agreeable of you, Glad, than I had dared expect!"

"Yes, I know it's wrong; but I suppose I can venture it," more hesitatingly now. "That is—I suppose we can go well muffled up?"

"Oh, of course!"

"And you are sure about real ladies having done the thing before now?"

"Dead sure of it, my dear."

"What ladies, though?"

"Well—ur—there was Lady Bannington, for instance; and she even alluded to it in one of her newspaper letters, I believe."

"But she was a Londoner, and might have regarded the adventure as only one of the forms of 'slumming it,' as they call it over there."

"Slumming it!" in a species of amazement; "and in connection with the Red House? Oh, come now, you must be joking."

"Well, you needn't look so horrified. I'll go. But—you are really a member of the club yourself?"

"I'll cheerfully swear to that, my dear!" with exceptional heartiness, since it was about the first real truth he had yet spoken. "Come along for your wraps. The drive in the crisp air ought to give us an excellent appetite into the bargain."

Twenty minutes later, or less, they had accordingly quitted the ball, and were duly proceeding northward in the close coach that Weymouth had caused to be in waiting, while a neighboring church was tolling out twelve.

"This seems so naughty," murmured the warmly-muffled shepherdess, nestling close to her companion's side in the most sisterly of manners. "But, then, for that very reason I suppose we ought to find it nice."

"Oh—ah—of course," he drawled, after which he indulged in a brief reverie, which was neither wholly comfortable nor the reverse.

CHAPTER IV.

THE RED HOUSE.

LORD TRESSILLIAN'S meditations at this juncture were, in fact, more of a surprise to himself than anything else.

He should have felt altogether triumphant, and yet was not quite able to as yet.

Having succeeded thus far in his plot, he could scarcely realize how he had succeeded in doing it so easily.

How, he kept asking himself, could he have kept up the foregoing confidential chat with such a young woman as Gladys Challoner—whom he knew as exceptionally intuitive and penetrative, even for an American young lady—in the assumed character of her own and only brother, whose every idiosyncrasy she would naturally be so thoroughly conversant with, without in some way betraying himself?

True, he was an excellent mimic, and had been constantly on his guard in formulating the counterfeit; but for all that it seemed unnatural that he should have succeeded so admirably, without a break, and without apparently arousing her suspicion for a single instant.

However, puzzling as it was, did not the fact remain that he *had* succeeded, that she was there at his very side, unsuspecting, trustful, sisterly, chatty, and that his plot was indisputably a thorough triumph up to this difficult point?

Yes; he must be even more of a born actor than he had deemed himself; she could suspect absolutely nothing of the stupendous deception that was being practiced upon her credulity; in a short time boldness—the boldness of his unmasking—would be his yet more masterly cue, and, win or lose, that would be the end of it, one way or the other.

Having thought and argued himself into this more hopeful frame of mind, the accomplished scoundrel brightened up amazingly.

Still on his guard, he responded agreeably to his companion's animated chat throughout the long drive, and was even more brotherly and self-complacent than heretofore.

Tressillian was a typical English aristocrat of the sort that occasionally figures with such effrontery in the courts of bankruptcy, in divorce trials, in turf scandals, in pretty actress's professional and domestic turmoils, *et al.*, both to the disgust and bewilderment of reputable American observation, and one would think to the lasting disgrace of the effete caste-system of which these unsavory manifestations are both the natural accidents and the enduring shame, were it not for some comprehension of the na-

tional flunkysim that is the excuse for its continued existence.

He had at one time had some publicity in New York with regard to some theatrical squabble, and his published reply to the newspaper reporter who was "interviewing" him on the subject was sufficiently characteristic of the man.

"Look here, my friend," said he, with phlegmatic good humor, "the whole of the trouble, you know, seems to be that you Americans either can't or won't understand me. I am simply one of the sort that don't care for anything!"

This was the species of ruffian who now fondly imagined himself to be master of the situation with regard to the hand and fortune of Miss Gladys Challoner.

But, as has been already intimated, the noble lord was not absolutely, unrelievedly mercenary and sordid in the promotion of this plot, which an equally unscrupulous and cosmopolitan American would have known better than to attempt.

He condescended to permit his feelings to be enlisted in the affair. He had met the young lady frequently in society, and her beauty and accomplishments were exceptional. And now the trustful, animated talk of the supposed fair creature at his side, the confiding companion of that long drive Harlemward in the dark, was not without its additional charm.

"By Jove!" thought Tressillian, "but she'll be a treasure in more ways than one. A fellow wouldn't get tired of her in a month. Besides, it's rather the thing nowadays for us titled men to snap up American wives. And they do say that when the ridiculous old cockalorum, her grandfather, dies, she'll have a cool million sterling in her own right."

At last the coach reached its destination, and the muffled cavalier in white and gold handed out his muffled shepherdess-companion, with an excess of the confidential brotherliness that he had thus far carried out so swimmingly—in his own estimation.

"Well, here we are, Glad," said he, with a sign to the two men on the coach, which thereupon moved on slowly up the silent, poorly-lighted thoroughfare. "And no mud on your dear little respectable skirts so far, eh?"

"Dear me!" and she took in her surroundings with an air of profound curiosity. "So this is your naughty Red House?"

A large, rambling old wooden mansion, in the middle of spacious and more or less neglected grounds, and doubtless one of the few remaining pre-revolutionary landmarks even in the still sparsely settled portion of upper Harlem, it occupied a commanding and isolated site, with a glimpse of Central, or M'Comb's Dam Bridge in the near prospective, and the sluggish river itself.

There were signs of comparatively recent repairs, indications of perhaps subdued festive animation within were afforded by the twinkles of bright light escaping through the closely-shuttered windows, while there was a hospitable passage-lamp at the road-gate, and yet another at the main entrance, which was cozily hooded by an old-fashioned piazza, while a grave-looking domestic, in sober livery, whose expressionless, wooden face suggested the maximum of subservient discreetness, came slowly down the walk to meet the arrivals with old-fashioned obsequiousness.

Neither the masked faces nor the imperfectly concealed masquerading costumes of the newcomers seemed to make the slightest impression upon this unexceptionable retainer, who, for all that, betrayed a keenness of observation at the outset, which was not without its embarrassment.

"Evenin', me lud," was his murmured greeting, in the choicest of yellow plush Londonese, before he could be forestalled. "Will it be a supper for two, me lud?"

"Yes, in the Blue Room," Tressillian, angrily, while avoiding his companion's startled look of inquiry. "And of the best."

Silently conducted, they entered the house, crossed a broad, soberly-furnished, well-lighted hall, mounted a wide staircase, all without meeting a soul, and were speedily ensconced at a square table in a large, charmingly furnished apartment, tapestried in blue and bronze, with a heavily curtained window at either end, two or three small doors at one side, covered with drawn portieres, that might give ingress to smaller or cabinet apartments, and on the opposite side the graceful, unrelieved fall of the draped hangings, through which there seemed to come a muffled murmur of men's voices, together with other sounds, suggestive of gambling games, or something of the sort, in progress not far away.

When the attendant had been dismissed, the shepherdess, having cast aside her cloak, settled down comfortably at the table, and after a curious glance around, looked at her masked companion quizzically.

"Quite a serviceable flunky that, I should say, Ran!" she observed.

"Quite," was the rather constrained response.

"But why did he address you as 'my lord'?"

"Her companion, who had not even discarded his cloak or cavalier's hat as yet, drew a slow, determined sort of breath.

"Because," with a short laugh, in which there was no longer any attempt at disguise. "I am a lord, you know."

The other had started back in well-acted bewilderment and surprise.

"You, Ran?" she faltered, brokenly; "you a lord?"

He laughed again.

"How ridiculous—nay, unheard of," he cried, irrelevantly, "our retaining these masks all this time. Hasn't it struck you in that light, Miss Challoner?"

"Miss Challoner!" and now altogether in his own voice.

"I—I have retained mine," was the disjointed and seemingly still more amazed rejoinder, "because I—I did not find it oppressive in the chill night air."

"And I mine to keep up the deception that is no longer desirable. My dear young lady," coolly snatching off his mask, "I wonder if you can forgive the joke I have managed to play upon you so cleverly!"

She started back with a slight gasp, pressing her own mask—a much fuller-faced one than his had been—yet more closely over her features with a trembling gloved hand.

"Lord Tressillian!" she exclaimed; "you?"

"Yes," laughingly still. "Come, it is your turn for unmasking, my dear Miss Challoner!"

"No, no, no!" And she waved him wildly back.

"Oh, take your time about it, by all means!" carelessly. "But at least say that you forgive me."

"Why have you practiced this deception sir?"

"Can you ask?" eloquently. "It is because I love you!"

CHAPTER V.

ANOTHER UNMASKING.

THE seemingly deceived young woman made a disdainful gesture, though still pressing her mask closer about her face and apparently much frightened.

"Sir—my lord," she stammered, pleadingly, "what have I done that you should have deceived me so deliberately, so basely?"

In spite of her shrinking, he obtained possession of one of her gloved hands, and pressed it eloquently to his heart.

"Miss Challoner—Gladys!" he exclaimed, with an emotion that was perhaps in part genuine; "you have made me love you to madness, that is what you have done. It is my sole palliation, my sole excuse!"

"A fine palliation—a noble excuse, truly!" she indignantly wrenched her hand from his grasp, and repelled him. "Your love!"

"I swear to its truth, its honor!"

"Then why couldn't you have told me so in my own home?"

"To be rejected by yourself, and perhaps denounced as a broken-down titled gambler by both your brother and your grandfather?"

"Like enough."

"You acknowledge, then, that you would have rejected my love, if thus conventionally proffered?"

"Indeed, I do; though I would have done so with the frankness and gentleness due your rank."

"And now?"

"Now I do so with the contempt and loathing that you deserve!"

Lord Tressillian, who had discarded his cloak and plumed hat no less than his mask, folded his arms, and regarded her with a mocking and sinister look.

He was a stalwart and handsome man of the blonde Saxon type, his cavalier's costume setting off his powerful proportions to the best advantage, his florid features being perfectly regular and perfectly unintellectual, though there was a certain charm in the resolute recklessness of his fine blue-gray eyes.

"You are quite sure, then," he calmly queried, "that you cannot return my love?"

"Return it—your love?" scornfully. "I despise it as much as I do myself!"

"So!" philosophically. "Then I have made no mistake in practicing this deception and bringing you hither."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"I mean just this, my darling little termagant—with a light laugh—" that here you will not have the chance of rejecting my suit that you might have had under more conventional environments."

"Indeed! but I do reject it."

"Wait till you shall have thoroughly realized your position."

"My position?"

"Yes."

"What sort of place is this?"

"A gamblers' club house. Listen to those voices, the click of those ivory counters. This room is but a vast balcony or gallery overlooking a hall, concealed from us at present by that wall of tapestry, wherein fifty or a hundred reckless and more or less intoxicated men-about-town are absorbed in their desperate games of

chance. At a turn of my hand the intervening curtain disappears, and you are exposed to them all as my companion in this festive den. Miss Challoner, the best, the most circumspect of young ladies are not looked for in such a place, and in such companionship."

"Your own companionship, nevertheless!"

Lord Tressillian shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"That is just it, my dear young lady," he candidly avowed. "No other companionship could more hopelessly compromise you under the circumstances."

"Sir, you are a villain!"

"Admitted."

"An unmitigated villain!"

"Not quite that," looking at her steadily,

"for I still love you!"

She made a furious, impotent gesture, but obeyed his sign to silence as a waiter made his appearance with the supper that had been ordered.

"Perhaps you are not quite yet in the mood to join me here," pursued the scoundrel, when they were once more alone. "But at least let me offer you a glass of wine."

As the offer was declined with silent contempt, he brimmed a glass of champagne for himself and drained it enjoyingly with the utmost nonchalance.

"Sir, tell me what I am to expect from you!" exclaimed his companion, seemingly with uneasy impatience. "I must understand you fully."

"Good!" he cried; "and understand me you shall. Gladys Challoner, this night your hand and your fortune are to be made mine, by the right of conquest and wedlock!"

"You must be insane!"

"Never was saner in my life."

"My hand and my fortune?"

"Exactly! Of course, if I can't have your heart in the bargain, that, my dear girl, is altogether your own affair."

"Indeed!"

"Just so. I will cheerfully enlighten you to the full. My bosom friend and ancient, the Hon. Mr. H. Peyton Weymouth, accompanied us hither—it was he on the box with the coachman—after leaving your brother hopelessly drunk in the wine-room of the *bal masque*. He will be here again presently with a minister of the Church of England. Rather a disreputable chap personally, this latter, I must acknowledge, though a college class-mate of my own; somewhat given to drink and ruin generally, you know, though still in orders, which will render his officiation perfectly legitimate and binding, if a trifle off-hand. Well, there you are, Miss Challoner—the plot *in toto*! Now, do take a glass of wine with me."

She was by this time looking steadily at him through her mask.

"Lord Tressillian, you are no less a stupid fool than a consummate knave!"

"Come now, that's candid, to say the least. In what way, pray?"

"In every way! But particularly in your self-deception."

"Ah! my self-deception, eh?"

"Exactly. In supposing for an instant that the success of your cheap and cowardly plot to this point could avail you anything further."

"Humph! wait and see."

"In dreaming for a moment," she went on, ignoring his interruption, "that you could entrap or force a girl of my position into marriage by any such preposterous and utterly detestable means!"

"You are only just in the trap, my dear; wait till you are out of it."

"Are you in earnest?"

"Well, I should say I am!"

"And you really think you can force me—an American lady—here to-night into this marriage, as you propose?"

"Indeed I do."

"Well," with a really amused laugh, "then you are certainly, sir, the most egregious fool, even for an Englishman, that I have ever heard or read of."

Lord Tressillian was nettled.

"Come!" he exclaimed, again seizing her gloved hand, and this time with a rough grasp; "it is quite evident that you don't fully understand the extent of the snare into which I have lured you. Come; I shall make you understand it forthwith!"

He dragged her up to the side of the room curtained by the unbroken fall of the blue and bronze hangings.

Here at a touch of his disengaged hand the drapery slightly parted, revealing the interior of a large sumptuously-furnished, brilliantly lighted apartment, of which this blue chamber was, as he had declared, nothing more than a sort of gallery-annex, and which was filled with fashionable gamblers engaged at various games of chance, or crowding convivially around a bar at which champagne was popping and stronger drinks being disposed of right merrily.

"Gladys Challoner, behold!" said Tressillian. "At another touch of my hand, this entire drapery shall be swept aside, and you exposed here in my company to the eyes of that flippant crowd. Among them are doubtless many of your heretofore admirers—the elite of New

York's wealthiest and most fashionable young men. You will be hopelessly compromised."

"Heavens!" gasped his captive; "you wouldn't do such a thing?"

"I swear that I will on this instant, unless you promise to marry me on the spot, as I have proposed!"

"Coward!"

"That is all very well; but do you consent, or do you not?"

"But I would not be recognized by yonder roisterers, for I am still masked."

"True; and now is the moment for you to reveal the loveliness of the face thus concealed."

"No, no, no!"

"Off with it, or shall I remove it for you?"

"Wait then, my lord. I will spare you the trouble."

Then the mask was stripped off, and the scoundrelly nobleman let fall the curtain, staggering back as if confronted by a grinning death's head, in lieu of the scared and pleading loveliness he was expecting.

"Mark Wellborn!" he faltered; "the detective? Good Lord! what can this mean?"

"Merely a case of the bitter bit, or the duper duped!" was the calm response. "Wait a minute, my lord; there is more in reserve for you."

CHAPTER VI.

THE PLOTTER FOILED.

WELLBORN thereupon called out, in a low distinct voice: "Enter, please!"

The portiere before one of the adjoining cabinets opened, and the genuine shepherdess and her white-and-gold cavalier—Gladys Challoner and Randolph, her brother, both unmasked—stepped into view.

"I told you I would expose the villainy of this plotting scoundrel," said the bogus shepherdess, with a smile. "Have I succeeded to your satisfaction?"

The young lady's sole reply was a glance of mingled derision and scorn for the discomfited Tressillian, while Randolph merely scowled and knitted his brows.

"I say, my lord!" cried the fashionable detective, mockingly, "hadn't you better raise yonder curtain, as you threatened, and exhibit to the naughty gilded youth in the gaming room beyond, how hopelessly you have compromised—yourself?"

Still dumfounded, Tressillian could only mutter something inaudibly in response.

And at this juncture, to make his defeat more galling, another door gave ingress to the astonished Weymouth, who was accompanied by the scapegrace Church of England parson whose services were to have been utilized in the longed-for denouement of the cunning plot.

"Bless me!" stammered the 'honorable,' "there appears to be something unlooked-for hereabouts, you know."

"Ahem! I should say so," echoed the 'reverend,' clearing his throat. "Seems to be—ur—something not altogether provided for."

"Mr. Wellborn," observed Randolph Challoner, in a strangely forced voice, "oblige me by conducting my sister to our coach, which you will find in waiting. I will join you in a few minutes."

"Certainly."

But, before the detective could quite get the young lady off the scene, Randolph Challoner (who was an enthusiastic member of the New York Athletic Club, it may be said in passing) had lost his patience.

He bounded suddenly forward, knocking Tressillian senseless with a tremendous blow between the eyes, and then, wheeling with the rapidity of lightning, a second blow from the same trenchant fist spread the Hon. H. Peyton Weymouth's nose over the lower part of his face, and also landed that ornament of the fortune-seeking British aristocracy full length on the carpet.

"As for you, sir!" and the righteously indignant youth turned furiously upon the scapegrace curate, "your cloth is your protection—the cloth that is so undeservedly disgraced in your contemptible person—and it is well for you that it is so."

He then coolly resumed his cloak and hat, and followed his sister—by this time very pale and nervous—and the detective—out of the apartment and out of the house.

"Oh, Ran, you shouldn't have been so violent!" murmured Gladys, when they had entered the coach and were on their way downtown. "Lord Tressillian, especially, will never forgive or forget it."

"He'd be a mighty poor specimen of a man if he did," replied the young man, composedly.

"But he is a duelist, besides being a very vindictive and desperate man on occasion. I have heard that much about him."

"Don't be alarmed, my dear Glad. Dueling isn't allowed in this country, and I rather fancy that I can take care of myself against any other sort of reprisal that the titled cur may attempt. Besides, by this time to-morrow he will find this town too hot to hold him—at least in decent society."

"What are you talking about, Ran? You won't make this affair public?"

"Socially, yes—by my faith! The man shall be generally known among our set, at least, for the moral leper that he is."

Gladys clasped her hands.

"No, no!" she cried. "What will every one think? and what will grandpapa say?"

"Served him right!" that is what your collective 'every one' will think, my dear, while grandpapa shall simply know the truth and digest it. I am determined on this. Mark, don't you approve of it?"

"I do," was the prompt response. "There is certainly nothing that Miss Challoner need be ashamed of in the sensation that will be created, while this vulgar sprig of a Tressillian will be ostracized and crushed. As for old Mr. Challoner—well, in spite of his—ur—rather inordinate family pride, I haven't a doubt that he will speedily look at the affair with more or less satisfaction. English aristocrats, as we know, are his abomination, notwithstanding that he is so much of an aristocrat on his own part. At all events, the open, unconcealed course is always the best."

Gladys made no further objection, however she might continue to feel on the subject, and, after Wellborn had been profusely thanked and complimented on his inestimable service, the conversation was suffered to seek a different channel.

"Shall you return to the ball?" asked the detective, after a while. "It is not yet three o'clock, and the fun should by now be at its top notch."

"Not I, for one!" exclaimed Miss Challoner, with a little shiver. "If Heaven will forgive me for this one transgression, I shall promise never to offend again."

"I rather fancy I've got enough of the Arion, too," said Randolph.

"I rather think I shall have to go back, for my part." And, opening his cloak, Wellborn glanced down over the unsexing costume with a comical look.

"True," replied Randolph, "and we'll drive with you to the doors, and wait until you can return to us Mephistopheles once more."

"Thanks!" and the necessary order to the coachman was given. "But it will be in my own character that I shall return to you, if at all."

"Good, then! but how is that? Do you mean to say that you have an assortment of masquerading costumes at your command when on professional duty at such entertainments?"

"As a matter of course. Otherwise my services would be of little use in detecting the jewel-thieves that infest them."

There was an awkward silence, after which young Challoner suddenly burst out with:

"Wellborn, how could you descend to this absurd vocation, anyway?"

"Hold on there, old fellow!" was the good-humored response. "Descend, indeed! I am useful and work for my living, which I never did in the old days, because not compelled to by necessity. That is all there is about it."

"Well, well," discontentedly. "How could you take to it, then?"

"What would you?" philosophically. "My fortune was gone at a single sweep, and with it went my prestige, position, friends. I had been brought up as an elegant do-nothing. I hadn't the training for entering a learned profession, the talent to become a writer, or inclination for trade, whereas detective work had always possessed a fascination for me. Perhaps you remember my maiden effort at the rich Mrs. John Jacobs's daughter's wedding reception, where I recovered the hostess's missing diamond tiara, and saved the gem of the wedding presents from going into the pocket of a professional shop-lifter who was having full swing under the mellifluous title of the Baroness de Vavasour?"

"Yes, every one knew about that."

"Very good; it was my entering wedge. In less than six months my peculiar detective services were in vogue. Now," half-sarcastically, "there is scarcely a big private entertainment among the *bon-ton*, or a huge public ball, for that matter, where I am not in demand at my own figure, which I need hardly say is a steep one. Wherever there is likely to be a fashionable crush, there I am on hand, in one character or another, to look after the family plate, the ladies' diamonds. I am the 'go.' An affair could scarcely be ultra-fashionable without my useful, if somewhat equivocal, presence. And," with a short laugh, "as Waltzing Wellborn, the Upper-Crust Detective, I am become a name, a reputation, a social value, and—an exile, an outcast for evermore from the golden circle of the *creme de la creme*, of which I was once the honored guest, and which I can now protect, but enter as an equal nevermore."

"That's just it," commented Randolph, still with a suggestion of impatience. "But it is the way of the world—a sort of unwritten social law you know, and you can't complain."

"Who is complaining? You seemed to question my ostracization as being self-wrought, and I have simply justified myself. That is all."

"And it is enough," interposed Gladys, who had thus far maintained silence. "Way of the

world, or social law, whichever you call it, the result is equally unjust and contemptible. Mr. Wellborn, you have never lost anything in my estimation, at all events."

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE WEE SMA' HOURS.

WELLBORN gave the young lady a quick, grateful glance (there had been an old warmth between them in his brighter days), but the carriage came to a stop at the doors of the *bal masque* just then, and he abstained from making any reply.

"There is really no need in your waiting for me," he said, when about to get out.

"But we choose to do so, old fellow," replied Randolph, "for I know that you still lodge somewhere in our neighborhood. So hurry up!"

"As you will, then." And, wrapping his concealing-mantle yet more closely around him, the fashionable detective vanished among the crowds still lingering about the theater entrance.

It was now past three in the morning, and very dark and chilly, it being about the middle of February; but there was almost as much animation at the threshold of the ball as at midnight, though more couples were leaving than arriving, and there was the consequent crush of coaches at the entrance.

Wellborn quickly returned, looking the handsome, unassuming little gentleman that he was, in his quiet evening dress, with fashionable top-coat and glistening hat.

"The ball is already fast breaking up," he said, looking in at the coach window, "so that my duties are about at an end. You still wish me to share your conveyance?"

"What a question!" cried Randolph. "Come in, old fellow!"

"No; if I accept, it must be for a box-seat along with the driver."

"What for?"

"I'll tell you later on."

And, affording no time for expostulation, he hurriedly sprang up outside, and gave the word to the coachman.

"What an odd fish Mark has developed into!" observed Randolph, as they were moving off, and with a renewal of the discontent in his tone.

"In what way?" asked his sister, quietly. "Because he is not ashamed to work for his living, and be of some use in the world, and to the society that so unjustly ostracizes him for being so?"

Randolph looked at her sharply. Grateful as he might be for the signal service that had that night been rendered them by the detective's address and cleverness, he had little sympathy beyond the limits of the exclusive set to which he belonged. In fact, the great McAllister himself could scarcely have been more of a stickler than Ran Challoner for the self-privileged exclusiveness of his vaunted Four Hundred.

"I hope, Glad," he drawled out, "that you are not capable of forgetting—anything." With a pause before the last word that was sufficiently comprehensible.

The young woman's lovely face betrayed a slight flush, but that was all.

"I am not capable of forgetting—myself, thank you, Ran," was her composed reply.

"I did not mean that of course, or not exactly that."

"What then?"

"Capable of forgetting that times are not what they were—and that Mark Wellborn can never again be of us and of ours, socially."

"No need of forgetting what I have never accepted as a truth!" with some show of temper. "Pray, leave me to take care of my own social standing, Ran Challoner."

Her brother laughed.

"Oh, of course! I give you fair warning, that is all. You know, however, the effect of the mere mention of Wellborn's name in grandfather's presence."

"Yes, yes, yes!" And nothing more was said on this occasion.

The Challoners occupied a magnificent Fifth avenue residence, in the immediate neighborhood of Central Park.

"I wish we might ask you to our ten-o'clock breakfast, Mark," drawled Randolph, with no little embarrassment, while extending his hand as they were departing.

"Don't mention it," was the cheery reply, accompanied by a perfect bow for Miss Challoner, who stood silently at her brother's side. "Couldn't think of accepting in any event—even apart from 'grandpapa's' prejudices, you know," with a pleasant little laugh. "Engagements, engagements! Good-night, both!"

"Hold on! You haven't told us why you insisted on taking an outside seat."

"You remember the big bruiser from over the water, who sought to distinguish himself before the Athletic Club, six weeks ago."

"Tressillian's *protege*? I should say I do."

"Well, I saw him in the crowd, together with several others of his ilk, a short time ago. And, taking into consideration our misunderstanding with Tressillian, I—I thought it might hint of possible further unpleasantness for Miss Challoner and yourself."

"Humph! I understand. And so you wished to bear the brunt of any such possibility on the sly?"

"The deuce! you take it too seriously. What does it amount to? Good-night, or rather good-morning, my boy. Miss Challoner, my profound respects and good wishes!" And, with a swift parting bow and touch of the hat, he was gone at a brisk pace up the silent street—the coach having been dismissed as soon as vacated.

"What fresh danger could he have hinted at?" Gladys anxiously inquired in a low voice, while her brother was applying his night-key with extra secrecy, it being rather desirable that entrance should be effected without arousing Grandpapa Challoner, who was a good deal of an ogre in his way. "Would Lord Tressillian be capable of wreaking his revenge through the aid of hired ruffianism?"

"Possibly. A baffled gambler is a queer fish, even when a live lord, especially after he has undergone a dressing-down, you know."

"What! and Mark—I mean Mr. Wellborn—is left to face whatever fresh danger may threaten, alone?"

"Fresh fiddlesticks! Here we are at last, Glad. Get in with you, my dear girl, and for God's sake—or grandfather's at least—try to go to sleep on some other thought than a mere detective, and his affairs!"

Nevertheless, after Gladys Challoner's maid had assisted her to disrobe, and then been dismissed, the young lady did not finally seek her pillow without a parting look at a certain photograph, unearthed from a secret corner of her dressing case, that bore a surprising resemblance to the young man who had so outraged his erst fashionable belongings by losing his fortune and becoming a useful member of society at large.

"Why must a girl belong to an exclusive Four Hundred, or Six Hundred, or whatever the magic number may be?" murmured Gladys Challoner, while sinking to sleep. "Or if she must, then why can't the best and truest and bravest man in all the world belong to it too?"

To return to Wellborn, he had thoughtfully pursued his way toward his boarding-house, which was not far away, though only on the outlying skirts of the ultra-fashionable quarter of Mr. Challoner's residence, and was in a reverie somewhat the reverse of pleasant, now that he was left to himself.

He was barely a middle-weight in the pugilistic parlance of the day.

That is, he was rather slight of form, and barely up to the average American stature, say five-feet eight; which together with a soft, gliding, all but effeminate grace of movement, had enabled him to counterfeit so successfully the masquerading part of Miss Challoner, who was above the medium feminine height and charmingly robust in proportion.

But every motion of the perfectly-knitted frame was instinct with athletic symmetry and unconscious power.

As he turned into a comparatively dark cross-street, a huge, bullet-headed fellow, with short-cropped bristling hair, the muscular movement of a London dray-horse, and hands like a pair of Cincinnati hams, suddenly stepped before him in the imperfect glimmer of a fading street lamp.

"Aha, Buxton, eh?" observed Wellborn, pleasantly. "Doing a little of New York by gaslight, eh?"

It was Tressillian's *protege*, the English bruiser, heretofore alluded to.

He looked over the slight-built, kid-gloved little gentleman, so easily and smilingly posed before him.

Then, with a back-fling of his mighty shoulders and a heave of his giant chest, he burst out into a hoarse, beer-smelling, "Haw, haw, haw!" that was perhaps the best aspiration ever accorded to his ordinarily murdered letter H.

"Ear 'im!" he guffawed. "E be hactooally hanimate, kid gloves, white choker and hall! No, my little cad—cad is the music, my little man, cad!—Hi hain't a-doin' so much of New York as Hi 'ave a mind of doin' you. Haw, haw, haw!"

Up went his enormous fists, with the gently see-sawing motion—that is the opening preliminary of pugilistic effort among the "science."

But if the burly brute had calculated on intimidation or an easy job, he was woefully out in his reckoning.

In an instant, though with the smile unbanished from his lips, Mark's top and under-coats were hanging on a convenient tree-box, and his own delicately-gloved fists were in the air.

"Let 'im 'ave it, Buxty!" cheerily counseled a voice from somewhere in the shadow of a neighboring tall house. "There's two quid in layin' of 'im bout, as me lud promised."

Then there was a series of rasping laughs in more voices than one, after which yet another called out:

"But mind your heye, Buxty! These 'ere heasy-go-in' little quality swells be hoften hall-fired 'andy with their maulevs, and—Ha!"

There had been but two opening passes, and the great bruiser was already reeling back under a crack on the nose, as if delivered by a steel hammer, and with the blood flying.

No more confidential comments out of the obscurity after that.

"Perhaps you've had enough?" calmly observed the Upper-Crust Detective, after a minute or two of similar execution. "If you have, all you've got to do is to say so."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BRUISER'S SECRET.

THE baffled bruiser was slowly regaining his feet from a very clever knock-down, his eyes blackened and half-closed, his pug nose reddened and enlarged to beet-like proportions, and a couple of his front teeth down his throat.

"W'at did I do with my hovercoat, I vunder?" he growled, groping for his discarded garment.

"Have you had enough?" repeated the detective, sternly.

"Mebbe Hi 'ave," suddenly roared the defeated bruiser, finding his garment, and springing into the air, "but my pals 'aven't 'ad bany. Whoop!"

Hoarse responses came from among the shadows, and three fresh English ruffians, of the Buxton, or White Chapel navy type, grunting their satisfaction, and sawing the air with their huge fists, were upon Mark like a whirlwind.

But the latter had in some measure suspected something of the sort, and was more or less prepared for it.

"English fair play with a vengeance!" he muttered.

Then, as he again dropped Buxton in his tracks with a lightning-like knock-out, a policeman's long night-stick was in his grasp as if by magic—though from what adequate concealment in his fashionable attire he could have produced it was a marvel—and he was darting among the others like an embodied cyclone.

He seemed to evade their tremendously-intentioned punches with the gliding agility of a snake, while the whacks and thuds of his hard-locust blows flew right and left with scarcely credible rapidity and effect.

Two of the ruffians managed to save a few of their bones and features intact by taking to their heels, as the third went down beside Buxton with a broken head.

"Aha, Mr. Wellborn, is it you? Well, you've managed pretty well on your own account."

The words were those of a patrolman, who, as is so often the case, was upon the scene just in the nick of time of being too late.

"Shall I run down them two others?" he continued, bending cursorily over the prostrate men, who were now beginning to come to.

Wellborn's club has disappeared, and now, having resumed his coats as unruffled as he had shed them, he was coolly stripping off and tossing away his tan-colored kids, which had been turned into ribbons.

"Oh, no, let 'em go!" he replied, indifferently. "These, too, for that matter," with a motion of his foot.

"What! you won't make any complaint ag'in' 'em, sir?"

"For what?" with a laugh. "For merely being so drunk as to imagine this sidewalk the stage of an athletic club, and myself as the chump cut out for their chopping-block. No, no; come along, Danvers, and here is a good cigar for you."

As he led the way along the street, he picked up and secreted, unperceived, a folded paper that he had observed to fall out of Buxton's overcoat pocket.

This paper he examined a few minutes later in the seclusion of his boarding-house apartment.

It was a brief, misspelled missive, in a scrawling feminine hand, to this effect:

"NEW YORK, Feb. —, 18—.

"BILL BUXTON:—

"I've noticed you following me up, and you've got to stop it."

"My game isn't your game, if I was your wife in the old Shoreditch days; and your sister isn't to be found hereabouts to my knowledge, even if she's yet on top of the earth, which I don't believe."

"Stop it, I tell you, and stick to your 'spere' in life, or you'll regret it. POLLY HOODMAN."

Misspelling and chirography alike attested the coarse illiteracy of the writer.

Not much in such a missive, one would say, to fix the thoughtful attention of a fashionable detective.

And yet Mark Wellborn smiled satisfiedly over its contents, as he carefully secured the letter while preparing for bed.

"Oho!" he thought. "Barmaid Polly in a brief return to her original role at last? And the bruiser has a missing sister, no less than an inappreciative wife? Well, well; something may come of this."

In bed, with the subdued light of his little grate-fire making fantastic flickerings on ceiling and wall, the young man's thoughts were many and various while gradually drifting off into the blissful unconsciousness of the sweet restorer's kiss.

At first he thought of his bygone luxury and uselessness, when he had seldom retired or risen save with an adept valet's assistance, and when his surroundings were so sumptuous as com-

pared with this snug but plain little fourth-story bed-chamber in Mrs. Le Duke's respectable but second-rate boarding-house.

But, to his credit be it said, he viewed the change with more complacency than regret.

In fact, this formerly useless but naturally bright and energetic member of New York's gilded youth was daily becoming more and more pleased with the useful and often exciting activities of his chosen profession, in the exercise of which he may be said to have created a new field and specialties for his talents.

Then his thoughts recurred to the strange adventures and disclosures growing out of the masquerade ball, and what complications might still evolve from them.

And finally, just as Sleep was kissing his heavy eyelids down and misting his faculties with her soft shadows, there came the one sweet thought that was ever his last and purest, and whose gentle image ever companioned him into the land of dreams.

A photograph of this thought-honeyed and treasured companion of his dreams no less by day than by night, was in the one-locked drawer of his dressing-case, folded away in a fleecy laced handkerchief that he had once claimed and received of its fair original as guerdon for a lover-like service, ere his wealth had taken to itself wings, and when life was still but a play-day.

There were other photographs of fair friends and acquaintances disposed about his room—photos of actresses, singers and other professionals, many of them fair to look upon, and all in broad view. But only this dream-hallowed one—the photo of Gladys Challoner—was deemed worthy of being thus jealously treasured away in the snowy folds of the kerchief that had been hers, and with no other eyes but his to haunt the pictured loveliness at times.

Wellborn was about descending to his late breakfast on the following morning, when he repressed a muttered impatience as there came a familiar but affectedly timid knock on his door.

"Oh, come in!" he said, finishing off a few touches with his wisp-broom.

"La, Mr. Wellborn!" exclaimed Mrs. Le Duke, entering; "ready for breakfast so soon, after your night's dissipation?"

She was a still handsome, black-eyed widow of forty or thereabouts, and on a very liberal scale, whose rather demonstrative admiration for her gentlemanly fourth floor front was little to his liking, though it was not without its numerous contributions to his material comfort that might otherwise have been conspicuous by their absence.

"It rather looks like it, ma'am," replied Mark, indifferently. "And how is the duchess this morning?"

"Oh, I'm all right, as a matter of course—save being a little lonely now and then," cheerily, and with a half-languishing look. "I thought I would just look over your socks and other things that came home from the wash, and see if any mending was required."

"Many thanks, ma'am, and in the mean time I'll go down to breakfast. No calls for me while I was away, I suppose?"

"No, Mr. Wellborn, not one. How was the ball?"

"Tip-top! Still, all balls are more or less alike." And he unceremoniously quitted the room.

She watched his retreating figure from the door, until it was lost to sight down the stairs; and then, hurrying into the room, began a systematic rummaging of his dressing-case, that was not a little at variance with the declared object of her visit.

"Nothing here—not a picture, a scrap of love-letter, or a souvenir of any sort!" she muttered; "and yet I am sure his pre-occupied looks must mean that I have a rival in his breast. Ha! the locked drawer again?"

She sought in vain to pick the lock, but, being no expert, without success, and then coolly proceeded to search the pockets of the various outer garments contained in the wardrobe for the key, but with no better luck.

"Never mind! I'll assure myself on this point sooner or later."

And with a long breath of disappointment that she ought to have got used to by this time, "the duchess" proceeded to the more legitimate task of really caring for her boarder's clothes, and especially with the dress suit of the preceding night, which, after brushing it painstakingly, she lovingly surveyed before closing the closet doors.

"Jake Le Duke never wore such beautiful clothes as those," she mentally soliloquized; "and he'd have looked like a plow-boy in a king's cloak if he had. But on Mr. Wellborn, how divine, how noble they look on him, just like everything else he wears! That young man needs a wife, he does!—a wife that can be a mother no less than a helpmate to him. And it sha'n't be my fault if he doesn't have one before either his or my hair has a chance to get gray."

This last suggestion caused her to survey herself rather hastily in the dressing-case mirror.

No; there was no occasion for alarm yet awhile.

It was a buxom and attractive, if somewhat *passee*, reflection which the glass presented to her, and with not a telltale silver thread as yet in the abundant and jetty hair that she smoothed down and adjusted with an approving hand. Then she chanced to think that there might be some delicacy that the servants would neglect in furnishing her favorite boarder's breakfast, and she made haste to the basement dining-room.

CHAPTER IX.

LADY BANNINGTON.

A FEW days passed without the detective hearing or seeing anything further of the Challoners, or of the other participants in the events of that memorable night.

Then he received a written request to call at Lady Bannington's.

He had heard of her intention of giving an entertainment, and, doubting not that his detective services were in demand, he personally answered the message with his accustomed promptness.

Lady Bannington was a dashing, intellectual and somewhat eccentric middle-aged English woman, a *divorcee*, not unfavorably known as both novelist and newspaper letter-writer, who with much wealth at her command, and after various and protracted travels in odd corners of the world, had at last settled down to a more or less permanent residence in New York, where she kept a rather pretentious establishment, and enjoyed the fullest recognition of the ultra-fashionable or upper-crust circles.

She was, moreover, a charming woman when she chose to be (which was not always, by the way), and, having known and appreciated Mark Wellborn in his pre-detective days, received him on this occasion with much affability, in which there was not a trace of condescension in the disagreeable sense.

"Thank you for coming so promptly, Mr. Wellborn," were her greeting words. "I am about to give a party—to use the old-fashioned word, though 'entertainment' or *soiree* are now the vogue—for which my invitations have already been sent. Are your peculiar professional services at my disposal for the event?"

Mark signified an affirmative.

"I hope," with her frank laugh, "you don't consider me coming to the point with brutal bluntness?"

"By no means, ma'm; you could not be brutal, if you were to try; and business should always be abruptly to the point."

"I agree with you, sir. What are your terms?"

These were stated and assented to, though her ladyship did not hesitate to say that she thought them high.

"As only the rich are in need of them," was the quiet response, "my terms are always high." And nothing more was said as to that.

"I am somewhat new as to your qualifications in such affairs, Mr. Wellborn," observed her ladyship. "It is customary to inform you beforehand of the invited guests, so that you can the better be on the lookout for interlopers, or suspicious characters?"

"Sometimes it is, sometimes it is left to my own discretion."

"There will doubtless be something of a crush. Here is the list."

It consisted of several pages, closely written over with names which the society detective rapidly scanned with his practiced eye.

"Ah, the Challoners, too?" he observed in an undertone while continuing to read.

"Yes—of course!" she was furtively studying his face. "A charming pair, and, though brother and sister, so devoted to one another! But you frown, Mr. Wellborn?"

"I wasn't aware of it," smilingly returning the list, with his courteous bow.

"What do you think of my list?"

"Unexceptionable, I should say; though there is one name that is new to me."

"Only one?"

"That is all."

"And that one?"

"A lady's—the Countess Von Gratzmarck, as it appears there."

Lady Bannington appeared uneasy.

"As it appears here, you say?" she repeated. "You would infer then that—that the name might be otherwise if appearing elsewhere?"

"Precisely."

"But what can you mean by that?"

Mark smiled in a kindly, half-bantering way he had.

"Nonsense!" he laughed. "As if your shrewd ladyship did not know as well as I!"

"But let me be sure that you know."

"The woman is most probably the light-fingered adventuress whom I once took into temporary custody at a famous wedding reception, where she was plying her trade under a no less high-sounding *alias* than this one—the Baroness de Vavasour."

"What! you really think so?"

"Yes—don't you?"

"Candidly, yes," with another of her frank laughs, which was now, however, intended to conceal her agitation. "Mr. Wellborn," after a pause, "may I trust you?"

"Implicitly."

"Thank you; I shall do so unreservedly. This woman *must* be included in my list; and I wish that she shall not be molested unless detected in some felonious act, which she has sworn to me to abstain from for the time being."

"Your ladyship's word is law."

"Without explanation?"

"Absolutely so. Though, in the event of the fair countess forgetting herself?"

"Then you are simply to bring her to me, without making the dereliction public."

Wellborn bowed, and rose.

"What do you think of my new drawing rooms?"

They had been conversing in a luxuriously furnished little reception-room, and as she spoke, she also rose, and opened a door going into the drawing-rooms in question from end to end—a vista of sumptuous and tasteful magnificence.

"They make a superb *salon*," he replied, simply. "I have seen larger and more costly appointments in New York, but none nobler or in more irreproachable taste."

Lady Bannington flushed with pleasure, for the praise was from a source worth having.

"It is good of you to say that," she said, reclosing the door. "In return for your complaisance, I'm going to venture on a question, which I trust you won't deem impertinent."

"Altogether at your ladyship's service, I am sure."

"You are still in love with Miss Challoner?"

"Madam!"

"Ah!" deprecatingly; "but I might have known it would anger you. Let my impertinence pass forgotten, please."

"No, no!" with a half smile; "your *amende* is too gracious, Lady Bannington. Granted, then."

"Thank you, Mr. Wellborn. You may one day, if not now, credit me with being impelled by no unworthy inquisitiveness. You are also still friendly with—with" (a fleeting color, which at last betrayed her) "Mr. Randolph Challoner?"

"Friendly, yes; that and no more. It was chiefly that inflated, half-cracked old ass, their grandfather, who never forgave me the crime of losing my money, and working for my living as a consequence."

"So I had indirectly understood. Tell me, then, if you will, what is the skeleton in the Challoner closet?"

Wellborn hesitated.

"Don't imagine I am after a sensation for a newspaper letter," Lady Bannington hastened to continue. "Not at all, I assure you."

"No need of such assurance, ma'm. It was not that which caused me to hesitate."

"It was your native delicacy."

"Perhaps so."

"So much the better! Mr. Wellborn, you are a perfect gentleman, and I heartily wish your fortune might be restored to you."

"I don't! My present enlightenment as to men, the world, and the sordidness of society, might in that case be obliterated. But your ladyship is at liberty to continue."

"Thank you again! I already know, then, from vague report, that the mystery in some way concerns the mother of Mr. and Miss Challoner."

"It does," after a pause. "Their father, and old Jefferson Challoner's only offspring, Washington Challoner, married a young Englishwoman, very beautiful, but greatly beneath him—I may say pronouncedly beneath him—in the social scale. Pending the old gentleman's wrath, they lived mostly abroad, though both their children are American born."

"While Miss Challoner was yet an infant in arms, sixteen or seventeen years ago, there was a scandal in London. Washington's wife, probably more beautiful and attractive than ever, was represented to have eloped with a scoundrelly member of your noble aristocracy named Peyton, I believe."

"It killed the deserted husband. Never a man of strong constitution, he speedily died of a broken heart. The children were brought to their grandfather. That is all."

CHAPTER X.

HER LADYSHIP'S SOIREE.

LADY BANNINGTON had hung upon this bit of family history with the keenest interest.

"The mother!" she exclaimed; "what became of her?"

"It is not known. Her name is never mentioned. Possibly dead, probably not. It has been proved, I believe, that she was not sinning but sinned against—the victim of a vile plot to compromise her beyond retrieval. Another of your worthy aristocracy's pastimes!"

"Observe that I attempt no defense of my class, Mr. Wellborn."

"I perceive that to your credit, ma'm."

"In what way was Mrs. Challoner so hopelessly entrapped?"

"I know little or nothing of the particulars. Her eyes were doubtless not opened to her fatal entanglement until too late. If still living, it must be in a condition most pitiable—self-conscious of no crime, not even an exceptional folly, perhaps, and yet beyond earthly hope—her hus-

band's death laid at her door, the world—even her own children's hearts—closed upon her forever—a living death!"

Lady Bannington held out her hand.

"A thousand thanks, Mr. Wellborn! I shall expect you, then?"

"Certainly." And he respectfully raised the pretty jeweled hand to his lips.

"And you will forgive my knowing the secret of your heart?" smiling.

Wellborn could not resist a retort upon her ladyship's self-sufficiency.

"If you will forgive me," he replied, with a significant but likewise smiling look, "for having discovered yours."

She would have affected an astonished incomprehension, but for the quiet penetration of his glance.

She accordingly blushed very prettily, instead, and the interview was at an end.

"What would Ran Challoner say, were he to guess it?" thought Wellborn to himself when alone. "Lady Bannington fairly over ears in love with him! Well, well, well! However, she isn't quite old enough to be his mother, though perhaps I ought to have more charity for my dear good old landlady, the 'duchess,' hereafter, in my own case."

Her ladyship was not out of the way in anticipating a crush at her entertainment.

It was something more than that, though very brilliant, successful and distinguished.

Comparatively early in the evening the Society Detective, in making his first passing bow to Gladys and Randolph—who were virtually inseparable there as elsewhere—noticed an eager, half-appealing look in her glance.

"Gladys is in trouble," he said to himself. "I wonder if that infernal cad, Tressillian, can have been annoying her again." And his brow momentarily darkened at the thought.

Later on, when Randolph was opening the fourth waltz with Lady Bannington herself, and looking somewhat forcedly happy—for he was in no sense whatever a ladies' man—and while Gladys was momentarily unappropriated for the dance, Wellborn hurriedly approached her.

"How unfortunate that your card must be filled!" he said, in a low voice. "Otherwise, you might even have a waltz for—a detective."

"I have this one reserved for him, unasked," and she gave him a bright look. "How glad I am you chanced to come for it, Mark!"

They were already in the glide-step maze, Wellborn in an excess of unalloyed happiness that was seldom his.

"I caught your look and its meaning," he managed to whisper at last. "You are in trouble?"

"Yes."

"Can I be of help?"

"Of course. Otherwise I should not be here. I did not care for it, and neither did Ran."

"What is it? and what am I to do?"

"I can answer your last question only—now. Come to me to-morrow morning."

"At what hour?"

"Not later than half-past ten. Should you come at ten precisely, the door can be opened for you by my maid, without the necessity of your ringing. Grandpapa need then know nothing of your presence, and Ran will have gone down-town."

"Depend on me."

"One thing more."

"What is it, Gladys?"

"If Lord Tressillian should make his appearance here to-night, and you should see me on outwardly good terms, or even dancing with him, don't misjudge me."

"What?" in unaffected amazement.

"Hush! It will not be my fault—remember that. But you will know all to-morrow."

There was no opportunity for further words, and, as the dance closed, she smiled up gratefully from the seat to which he had led her.

Then her countenance swiftly changed, though still retaining something of its smile as if petrified there.

There were courtly words speaking to her over his shoulder, and, as he made his retreating bow, Lord Tressillian complacently stepped in his place with brutal indifference to his presence, and the pleasant words:

"I do hope you have kept a dance for me," Miss Challoner.

But Wellborn had already taken himself off, after a last look of appeal from the only eyes he loved.

A short time after this, the detective for the first time had his eye upon the person already discussed in the foregoing as the bearer of more than one distinguished *alias*.

A handsome and redundant blonde, of thirty-two or three, but not looking her age, nobly formed, magnificently dressed, and with a self-possessed, becomingly proud air, the Countess Von Gratzmarck (for the time being) had just arrived, and was already the center of a group of admirers.

She was a man's woman, as they say, which signifies that she was instinctively more popular with the opposite sex than her own.

Mark Wellborn furtively eyed this woman for some time with a more or less puzzled mind.

Not as to her own personality or proclivities, with which he was sufficiently familiar.

But why should Lady Bannington—whose womanliness was beyond reproach, notwithstanding her reputation as a blue-stocking, a "character," and more or less of a Bohemian—submit to tolerating the adventuress as her guest in such exclusive company? to say nothing of her odd suggestion to the detective himself in the woman's behalf.

Moreover, how could the woman have the sublime cheek of thus reappearing so soon at such an entertainment, after her exposure at the wedding reception of but little more than a twelve month previous? There was no attempt at disguise, other than by her change of name. And even if the exposure aforesaid had not been made public, it had furnished an undercurrent of high-life comment for the very people among whom she was now moving once more so freely and composedly, drawing the admiration of the men, or at least of many of them, and apparently blissfully contemptuous of the cold hard looks of those of her own sex.

"Ah, I have it," said the detective to himself at last, with regard to this second half of his mystification. "She must have tacitly pleaded the kleptomania act, as so many of her betters have done. But who can her odd-looking escort be? The little old fellow looks like a dog-fancier in a dress-suit."

As to the first part of his mystification, however—Lady Bannington's toleration of the woman's presence at her *fete*—he was yet as much in the dark as at first.

He waited his opportunity until she had floated impressively through a quadrille with a bald-headed, but still jovial stock-broking widower as her partner, and then, as a new waltz was tuning up, and she stood comparatively alone, he made his dance-beseeching bow before her.

"Might I have the sublime honor," murmured the detective, in choice German, "of the noble *fraulein's* hand for this next *valse*?"

She had caught her breath a little at recognizing him, but managed to retain her composure.

"Speak English, if you please, sir," she said, with refreshing candor, her wide, China-blue Saxon eyes regarding him rather approvingly. "I could never endure nor master the language of my late husband, Count Von Gratzmarck, to tell the truth."

On his doing so, she replied with much affability:

"Sorry, sir; but my uncle, Count Hohenstauffer here"—indicating her little old companion, who at once came hopping and grinning to her side—"is already on my card for this dance."

"I rather fancy the count will yield to me in this instance," coolly replied Mark, leading her into position. "Come, now, Polly," in a lower voice, "I can't do without you."

CHAPTER XI.

THE ADVENTURESS.

THE "Countess Von Gratzmarck" had slightly changed countenance and bitten her lip at this perhaps unlooked-for familiarity of address on the part of her nonchalant partner.

But they were already in position, the music burst forth, and the next instant she was being whirled through the waltz with a delectable harmoniousness of accompaniment such as almost made her forget his unceremonious and scarcely respectful words.

"Only a few turns, for form's sake, you know, Polly," he whispered, half-apologetically. "And then we must slip away for a few moments' of cozy and confidential chat. I shan't bore you with this sort of thing for long."

A splendid dancer herself, she seemed floating as in a dream, her forehead bent almost to his shoulder, and yet her great blue eyes upturned to look at him through a pleasurable mist.

"Bore me?" she repeated, murmuringly. "Ah, for Heaven's sake, don't think of stopping as long as the music throbs! Now I remember, sir, it is as Waltzing Wellborn you are known. Heavens, with what reason!"

However, the dance came to an end at last, and he conducted her without ceremony to a corner, where they were in comparative retirement.

"Now, Polly, for our talk. I take it for granted you have recognized me from the first."

She was a very handsome woman, and with the tact and ability to make the best of her comeliness.

His half-bantering tone was the best he could have adopted, following as it did the Terpsichorean treat in which he had indulged her.

She regarded him composedly, but without any affectation of persisting in her counterfeit as against his penetration.

"The less said as to that the better," she replied, coldly, "though it wasn't as any Polly that you made my previous acquaintance."

"By no means," with his flashing smile.

"Would I forget *la belle Vavasour*?"

"You might as well, young man," dryly, "since she has ceased to exist. Why do you address me as Polly now?"

"Because, forsooth, I am speaking to Polly

Buxton, *nee* Hoodman, erstwhile the beautiful barmaid of the Charing Cross Railway Restaurant, London, though long since Light-fingered Polly, the adventuress, of the Lord only knows how many *aliases*."

"Was it that bulking chump, Bill Buxton, who once called himself my husband, that gave me away to you?" she asked, outwardly unmoved.

"In part, perhaps, though through no fault of his."

"Ah! By the way, Mr. Wellborn, would you mind bringing me an ice?"

"When we have finished our little talk—all in good time, countess. Is the little duffer acting as your escort a blood relation, allow me to ask?"

"He is my father," frankly, though after a reflective pause.

"So! why didn't I recall him? Little old Jemmy Hoodman, the White Chapel dog fancier—Ratcatcher Jemmy, eh?"

"He answers my purpose as Count Hohenhauser at present, my friend."

"Doubtless as Polly, the Ratcatcher's Daughter, answers your purpose as the Countess Von Gratzmarck, also?"

"Precisely!" with a ring of uncontrolled temper in her voice at last. "I am tired of this. What do you want of me?"

"In the first place, the three diamonds you nipped so cleverly out of Miss Vandergoold's necklace in your first quadrille of this evening."

A swift flush, and then her composure was as adamant as before.

"Here they are," with a short laugh, producing the jewels as she spoke, and slipping them into his hand with a lightning-like movement of her shapely gloved hand. "Of course, if I had known of your presence here, I would have been more circumspect."

"Perhaps so," dryly. "You will now accompany me to Lady Bannington."

For the first time the adventuress betrayed a certain uneasiness, and yet it was followed by a defiant, self-confident expression.

"What for?" she demanded.

"You ought to know, or guess. I was specially commissioned to watch, but not molest, you, save only in the event of your neglecting your promise to abstain from plying your trade. In the latter case, I was to take you to her in private. Come, *fraulein*!"

"I say, Mr. Wellborn," not stirring, but looking up at him with a bold, independent look on her comely but hard face. "Don't be in a hurry."

"Certainly not, countess. There is no special need. At your leisure."

"Look you, my friend," continued the woman, with unusual earnestness. "I am not a particle afraid of Lady Bannington—perhaps it is quite the other way. But, for several other reasons of my own, I would rather not face her in this thing to-night."

"Ah!"

"You can arrange the matter easily enough by returning the stones to the lady as though you had picked them up from the floor."

"Such a probable thing!"

"But not so incredible as it would seem. They were so loose in their setting as to positively insist on my taking them. I'd wager my head that she has had them reset at her jeweler's more than once."

"Well, granted that I *could* do as you so self-sacrificingly suggest?"

"But will you?"

"On one condition," after a slight pause.

"Name it."

"That you tell me how and why you are here in this company."

"Why I am here?"

"Yes; why you were invited—why you are tolerated—why Lady Bannington is afraid of you, instead of you being afraid of her?"

The long breath of relief which the adventuress had begun to take was not wholly accomplished.

"To tell you that," she said, circumspectly, "might be to surrender or weaken the hold you rightly infer that I have upon her ladyship."

"Perhaps not necessarily. I am not in Lady Bannington's confidence."

"Still, a secret when shared is only half a secret."

"My dear countess, you had better come with me to her ladyship at once. Besides, Miss Vandergoold may miss the stones from her *parure* at any moment."

"No, she is not likely to. They are from the back of the necklace, over which the Grecian twist of her old-gold hair dangles."

"I prefer not to take the chances."

"But they only concern me, and I am taking them."

"You have heard the condition," in a hard tone.

"I accept it, since I must. The secret of Lady Bannington's fear of me is this: She has until recently imagined that she is at liberty to marry again. I alone share with her the disappointing secret, that she is not so at liberty."

"Give me the particulars."

"Must I do that, too?"

"Unquestionably."

"Well, she was the *defendant* in the suit that divorced her, not the complainant. It was Sir Archibald, not she, who secured the divorce, with liberty to remarry."

"Go on!" imperatively.

"But that is all."

"No, it is not. Pray don't think me uncomplimentary, *fraulein*, but Lady Bannington, who is a woman of force and character, would never submit to tolerating such as you among her guests or associates, who are strictly of the *bon ton*, on such slight grounds as you have mentioned."

"You are really mistaken, sir! Her ladyship is anxious to one day marry again, which my exposure of her secret would, of course, make it impossible for her to do."

Wellborn shook his head a little impatiently.

"It would remain impossible, legally, whether you shared it or not. Her ladyship is not the woman to risk a charge of bigamy under any circumstances."

"But, indeed, Mr. Wellborn—"

"There is something else, I tell you!" sternly.

"What is it?"

"Have it, then!" doggedly. "I am to assist her in discovering the antecedents of Miss and young Mr. Challoner's mysteriously missing mother."

Wellborn almost betrayed his astonishment, but not quite.

"What can be her object in seeking such information?" he demanded.

"I honestly don't know, unless it is that she may be in love with the young gentleman, and hope to have him somewhat at her mercy in that way."

"But how can you be expected to find out anything of the unfortunate lady's antecedents?"

"I don't know that either, unless it be that she came from a—stratum of London life with which I—I am supposed to have been familiar. Really," and the "countess" fanned herself vigorously, "it is very close or over warm in these rooms."

"I shall get you your ice now, *fraulein*. That will do."

He accordingly did so, she putting the refreshment aside scarcely tasted as soon as he had again quitted her side, with the assurance that her little peculiarities would still receive his sedulous supervision.

"I must make that man my friend," she thought, a little resentfully, while looking after his graceful figure as he mingled with the brilliant and mobile throngs. "He waltzes just too divinely for me to assist in his destruction—that is, if he shouldn't make me hate him too much." Here little "Count Hohenhauser" came toddling up to her from amid the press.

"The 'owling big swell, Lord Tressillian, be a-lookin' for ye, my dear," was his courtly announcement, in an undertone.

"Send him to me then," she snapped out. "And look you, daddy, you're to hug the wall yet closer, while avoiding the supper room altogether, where they dispense the wines. Your looks would convict you, were you clad in cloth of gold."

With these filial words, she swept toward Tressillian, who was seen approaching, and was the next moment his partner in the polka that was forming.

As for Wellborn, he effected the return of the diamonds, informed Lady Bannington that all was serene thus far, and, after exchanging another glance with Gladys, remained to the close of the *soiree* without further incident.

CHAPTER XII.

MISS CHALLONER'S TROUBLE.

PROMPT to the instant of his appointment for the following morning, the Society Detective ascended the stoop of Grandpapa Challoner's stately brown-stone mansion, to find the entrance opened for him by Gladys's French maid, as had been promised.

It was a grand double house, and he was quickly conducted, without being perceived, to a small and apparently little-frequented reception-room to the right of the hall-passage, but with which he had been more or less familiar in other days.

Here the maid left him alone with Gladys herself, who quickly advanced to greet him with extended hand, and an elderly, venerable woman, who only looked up with a slight nod, but without rising from her seat near the comfortable grate fire.

Gladys herself took her visitor's top-coat, and made him sit in an easy-chair, after which she disposed of herself so as to face him, her entire loveliness of aspect presenting a look of comparative relief.

"It is good of you to be so prompt, Mark," she said, after the first commonplaces of greeting. "Aunt Betsey is in my confidence, as of old, and will of course remain."

He nodded, as much as to say, "That is taken for granted, I being an old-time favorite of your housekeeper's," and then at once assumed his business-like air and tone.

Aunt Betsey was a matronly and discreet-appearing old lady, who might have appeared attractive in her way, but for a pair of enormous

blue spectacles, which she was never seen without, and which disfigured her natural comeliness of feature and expression not a little. She was a taciturn and melancholy woman at all times, who might have had a "history." She had a strange, fluttering way with her hands, which never seemed tired of nervously smoothing out her apron or adjusting her cap-strings, and seemed to listen to what passed with a subdued but observant interest.

"Now what is the new trouble?" asked Wellborn, gravely.

"I shall not waste time with any preliminaries, Mark," the young lady replied, with forced energy. "You wouldn't suppose Lord Tressillian would venture to enter this house, after what has passed, would you?"

"I should say not! though the man's cheek is scarcely to be judged by the ordinary jowl standards, so to speak."

"And you remember something of grandpapa's revolutionary-aristocratic dislike for his lordship almost from the first?"

"Certainly."

"Well, he not only does venture to continue his visits here, but grandpapa has already not scrupled to convey to me that I might look further for a husband and fare worse."

"Humph!" And the sudden angry glitter in Mark's eye became a meditative scowl, while his lips were compressed. "What can have wrought this change in old Mr. Challoner?" ("the unmitigated old jackass," he would have much rather said, had he dared,) "do you imagine?"

"I can't imagine anything. That is what I want you to find out for me."

Then, as he looked up inquiringly, she continued:

"In fact, that is why I sent for you, Mark. I didn't know who else to apply to in my trouble and alarm."

"Perfectly right! I shouldn't have liked you to apply to any one else. How does the case stand at this moment?"

"Thus: Lord Tressillian is to call on my grandfather by appointment in half-an-hour. No, it is less than that now," with an uneasy glance at an ornate clock on the chimney-piece, whose dial marked ten minutes past ten. "He should be here in twenty minutes. I suspect that he is exercising some secret power over grandpapa, to compel his intercession with regard to me."

"Something of the sort, most probably. Well, then?"

"They will doubtless talk the whole thing over in the library directly on Tressillian's arrival."

"Yes?"

"Well, I want you to help me out in counteracting the Englishman's power over grandpapa by discovering its secret."

"Ah! of course I am at your service, body and soul, Gladys. But," slightly frowning, "you wouldn't have me do this by eavesdropping?"

"Candidly, yes," Gladys stammered, casting down her eyes. "Of course, I—I might do that much for myself, but—but—"

"Not to be thought of!" he hurriedly interposed. "I'll do it—yes, though it is something I have never done before! But as for permitting you to lower yourself—"

"Oh, Mark, don't put it in that way!" Gladys burst out, in real distress.

"How?"

"By inferring that I would ask or permit you to do something for me that I would be ashamed to do for myself. It isn't that, on my word, Mark!"

"Still, there is no other way that I can see."

"No, of course not; no other way than by listening. But I would have forced myself to the humiliating expedient in my own person—indeed, I would, only I dreaded to—to come perchance upon—upon some indiscretion in poor grandpapa's past that—that might lower him in my esteem!"

Her face was burning, and she covered it with her hands.

Wellborn was indignant, uncomfortable and filled with silent fury to see the sensitiveness of the girl he loved thus tormented.

"Don't, Gladys, don't!" he exclaimed. "The ridiculous, unconscionable old—I beg your pardon!—your dear grandfather isn't—er—exactly worthy of so much consideration from such an angel as you are. By Jupiter, he isn't! Come, look up bravely again." He respectfully drew her hands away from her face, to which she submitted. "There you are! And as for Mr. Challoner being capable of any chance indiscretion in his past—apart from revolution absurdities—make yourself easy. He can have been guilty of none. Come," rising alertly; "where am I to post myself?"

"In the alcove behind the library portiere," she replied, already cheered by his off-hand energy. "But wait!" There was a ring at the street-bell, and she glided to the door, setting it slightly ajar. "It is he already!" she continued, reclosing the door, after a brief peep along the hall, and returning. "The footman is showing him into the library. Come, Mark, good, kind friend that you are!"

But he signed for a pause in his turn.

"One moment!" he said. "Wasn't it Pinchet,

your brother's valet, that I saw crossing the back hall as your maid conducted me hither?"

"Very likely. An athletic, swarthy man, his mustache-ends ridiculously waxed, and a perpetual smirk?"

"Yes, yes! Perhaps you are not aware that he was formerly Tressillian's valet, and may consequently be a spy hereabouts in his lordship's interest."

"Heavens, no!"

"Ah! both you and Ray should have been placed on your guard before, but it was my neglect. Well, now then."

She silently opened a communicating door, and led the way through an adjoining and larger reception-room, the rich carpet into which their steps pressed rendering them absolutely noiseless, and thence by another door into a sort of ante-room, shut off from the study or library yet beyond by a sumptuous green-and-gold portiere, that fell in heavy, graceful folds from the gilded ring or curtain-pole that supported it down to the floor.

A swift glance through its slight middle parting revealed Lord Tressillian, sitting alone as yet, and seemingly with yawning impatience.

The detective signed his companion to retire, which she did, and then silently seated himself at the parting line in the curtains and patiently waited.

A moment later, however, a movement at the further side of the portiere attracted his attention to a half formless mass (for the ante-room was almost dark) crouching there, and all but hidden away by the superfluous folds.

There was another eavesdropper than himself, and doubtless unaware of his presence, so noiseless had been his entrance.

Wellborn approached the spot like a cat, and recognized Pinchet in the interloper.

CHAPTER XIII.

BEHIND THE PORTIERE.

THE fellow was on his knees at bo-peep upon his former master, while doubtless in absorbing expectancy of the coming interview, and had not the slightest suspicion of his fellow-spy's proximity, or even of his existence.

The detective took but an instant for deliberation.

Then his action was swift, silent and effective as the bolt from an air-gun.

A lightning-like, soundless movement, and his left hand was closed upon the fellow's throat with a grip of iron, while the muzzle of his revolver was at his temple.

There was not the ghost of an outcry possible, and a single glance from the man's out-popping eyes upon the stern, remorseless face of his captor was sufficient to repress any betraying movement.

Slowly, silently, Wellborn released his prisoner, and, with the revolver still leveled, motioned him toward the communicating door.

Pinchet obeyed the sign like a whipped spaniel, the detective following closely behind him into the adjoining apartment, and noiselessly closing the door behind him.

They were thus alone together in the main reception-room.

"So, Mr. Jules Pinchet," exclaimed Wellborn, in a low, menacing voice, "it was not enough that you were a spy in this house in your former master's pay, but you must also spy upon him, in his turn. What have you to say for yourself, scoundrel?"

The valet, who seemed quite overcome by fear, attempted no reply.

Then a sudden light of recognition leaped into the Society Detective's eyes, as he bent them yet more searchingly into the other's shrinking face.

"Ha! I am not mistaken," he muttered, exultantly. "Speak, spy, villain, *forçat*!" (galley slave) "or have you nothing to say?"

"Oh, monsieur, come now!" and the fellow bridled up a bit. "Spy, if you will, but *forçat*, convict—no, no—never!"

For answer, Wellborn unceremoniously tore open the man's waistcoat and shirt-front, and pulled down his various collars until the left shoulder, with its telltale branding-mark, was revealed in confirmation of his charge.

The wretch forthwith fell upon his knees, clasping his hands.

"Mercy, monsieur!" he faltered. "I am in your power—my reputation, my very bread—but mercy, mercy, I beseech!"

"You confess, then, that you are in my power?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Don't forget it, then, as you fear my resentment. Leave me!"

He pointed to the door leading into the hall, and the fellow slunk out of it without another word.

Mark turned the key in the lock, and noiselessly regained the ante-room as the voices of Lord Tressillian and Mr. Challoner from the library apprised him that the latter must have just entered to his visitor, so that nothing of importance could have been lost by the unforeseen interruption after all.

Resuming his post at the junction of the hangings, he was prepared to overhear everything that might transpire while obtaining a

fair view of the library interior and its occupants.

Mr. Jefferson Challoner, after submitting a little petulantly to Tressillian's hearty hand-shake, and still more hilarious greeting, had sunk into his favorite easy-chair by the central writing-table, and seemed to be trying to collect his thoughts for some half-dreaded emergency.

He was a tall, thin, bent old man, smooth-faced, partly bald, with such hair as was left him long-flowing and silvery white. He might have been eminently handsome, too, but for a puerile superciliousness of expression; and his general aspect was such as to excite a smile at first sight, by reason of his affectation in garb, speech and manner of a long defunct school of stateliness and courtesy, that was no less out of date than his opinions, predilections and prejudices. His head was very high and very narrow, suggestive of both inherent weakness and overweening vanity. It would have had more than room enough in a Number Six hat, whose ellipse would even then have had to be vastly narrowed and elongated to afford a comfortable fit. His delicate, high-cocked aquiline nose seemed to be everlastingly sniffing some unworthy or deteriorating contact. His mouth was very small, and chiefly the seat of that essay at inborn and intellectual superiority in the prevailing expression that, in conjunction with his affectation of costly ancientness in his dress, made him so ridiculous. His chin was still weaker—small, effeminate, inefficient; his eyes blinky, peevish and emotionless; his hands slender, long-fingered, with very long, scrupulously manicured nails, like those of an over-fastidious woman—ever a sign of forcelessness of character in a man.

He was jocosely known as Old Seventy-Six among his friends, and his favorite, everlasting boring hobby was that the only true American gentlemen were the direct descendants of illustrious Revolutionary forefathers, and that these formed a species of aristocracy, in comparison with which the loftiest family pretensions and titles of Europe were as nothing and their escutcheons but as fire screens.

In fewer words, the Hon. Jefferson Challoner (he had served out a dead politician's unfinished term in the lower branch of the Legislature in his younger days, after which even his inherited wealth couldn't foist his laughable deficiencies into a renomination,) with much of gentleness and still more tyrannical peevishness in his composition, was a good-deal of a natural-born fool.

Tressillian, who always found difficulty in keeping his countenance in the old gentleman's presence, had lighted a cigar, after deferentially obtaining a stately permission to do so, had croed his legs, thrown back his devil-may-care head, and was regarding him with a forced but complimentary expression of respectful awe if in the presence of a majestic obelisk, or so newly unearthed ruin of the unrecorded past.

"Well, my dear sir," he observed, with hearty but profound impressiveness, "here I am again, as you see. And, Mr. Challoner, I'll bet a tanner to an old hat that you could never guess what I am thinking about at this moment."

"I never bet, my lord," murmured Mr. Challoner. "Our set—ahem!—of the old American regime, as you might say, never do. It isn't dignified."

"And an excellent rule!" blurted out the Englishman, with a forced vehemence to mask his guffaw. "Bad practice, 'pon my life! and only indulged by us degenerate dogs of an inferior day. Haw, haw, haw! However, make a guess at what I was thinking about, honored sir."

"We never guess, either. My illustrious ancestors of colonial days and their heroic successors of the Revolution never did, and neither shall I."

"What an unmitigated old cad it is!" thought Tressillian to himself; but he only said aloud and yet more heartily: "I'll tell you, then. I was thinking—how my old dad, the Duke of Buckleminster, would relish your society, sir. Haw, haw, haw! There would be a pair of you, a match-tea, both so proud, so distinguished, so old-school, and yet so urbane, so suave, so elegant! Haw, haw, haw! I say there would be a pair of—Do you mark that, you high old cockalorum—"

He came to a full and confused stop, while Mr. Challoner, who had begun to rub his thin hands together with undisguised satisfaction, clutched his chair-arms nervously looked up horrified.

"Sir—my lord!" he gasped, the color ing under his thin complexion; "what word—er—you ventured to address to me."

"Honored sir," and Tressillian managed to mend matters by much gravity and earnestness. "I hope you will excuse my fancying myself in my father, the Duke of Buckleminster's shoes for the time being. It was merely the off-hand, endearing epithet he would be likely to use with you—in fact, a favorite tenderness of his when among his equals in rank and experience."

"Oh! ah! a rather unceremonious expression, though, you will allow?"

"Truly; but the duke wouldn't allow it—that is, ceremony, you understand—if with you. 'No, no, old Whackdoodle!' he would cry, clap-

ping you on the knee and punching you in the ribs; 'to our dogs of inferiors with ceremony! For such as we there is only the hand-clasp of sincerity and the cheek-by-jowl of equality and good-fellowship! That's his sort—the duke's, you know!"

"Is it, indeed?" Mr. Challoner was quite self-satisfied again. "Well, well, I don't know but that he is right; though it is only when in private among ourselves that we should thus relax and unbend."

"And now, my dear sir, what have you to tell me?"

"To tell you, my lord?" The old gentleman passed his hand a little wonderingly over his tony and vacant bald pate.

"Certainly," with continued geniality. "I am here by appointment, as you must remember."

CHAPTER XIV.

LORD TRESSILLIAN'S SECRET.

"Ah, I remember," said Mr. Challoner, suddenly brightening up with an additional air of superciliousness. "Well, my lord, I am afraid that matter of your proposed marriage with my granddaughter had better not be thought of any longer."

"Ah, indeed!" interposed the fortune-seeker, with a "we'll-see-about-that" air of indifference. "The young lady may possibly not altogether fancy me personally, eh?"

"That is one objection, my lord. In fact, I can't exactly account for the excess of her dislike for you."

"But I can," growled Tressillian to himself; though only saying, "Indeed?" aloud, with no diminution of his smiling composure.

"Yes," the old gentleman went on, "it is altogether unaccountable. The mere mention of your lordship's name in the desired connection is enough to throw her into hysterics of fury and indignation."

"She'd get over that in time," observed the other, coolly. "With your solid favor to back my suit, I'd take care of that. In fact, I'd bet a Derby winner against— But I mustn't forget that we're not betting at present. You spoke of this, however, sir, as but one objection?"

"Yes."

"Any other?"

Mr. Challoner's spare figure straightened up and dilated in his chair, and his loftiness of expression grew positively grandiose.

"Ah, yes, sir," he hemmed and hawed. "You see, my lord, I have been reconsidering this matter, as in honor bound and in what is due to me personally."

"Yes, yes!"

"Well, my lord, notwithstanding that your family is titled, ancient and fairly reputable—that is, for an English family, though not to be compared with our old colonial and revolutionary stock, on this side the water—our true and sole American aristocracy of birth and brains, through heroic generations, you understand—"

"Tut, tut! Haw, haw! Oh, yes; as a matter of course!"

"Gad! glad you take me so readily, my lord," with a self-satisfied condescension. "Well, as I was about to proceed, though we might let up on your short-comings in this respect of family, my lord, I—ahem!—for one can't blink the fact, as all but self-confessed on your own part, that you are hopelessly bankrupt, and no less in love with my granddaughter's prospective fortune than with herself, sir. There you are, my lord!"

But Lord Tressillian did not haw-haw again, as he might well have done, if less nearly interested in the business in hand.

"Enough of this rot, if you please, sir!" he replied, roughly enough. "Look here. You may remember my delicately hinting to you of certain facts in my possession affecting the fate and family connections of a certain person in whom you could not fail to have an interest?"

"Sir!" haughtily. "But yes, I deign to recall something of the sort."

"No more of your ridiculous top-loftiness with me, you blasted old fossil! Those facts relate to your dead son's wife, the mother of this girl and her coxcomb of a brother!"

After his first shock of amazement, Mr. Challoner surprised his visitor by giving way to a brief access of fury.

"To the devil with your secret, sir, if that is its substance!" he shrielled out, fairly hopping in his seat. "That woman! She was beneath us from the first—my son disgraced our select blood by marrying her! What should I care for her fate or family?"

Tressillian coolly lighted a fresh cigar.

"Don't jump out of your skin, my dear sir!" he counseled, with easy-going affability; "but pray consider how the opinion of the world—public opinion, you know—would affect your select blood—haw, haw!—if the true history of this family skeleton of yours were made known. And as for the facts in my possession, you don't know them just yet."

His puerile passion already but a spent gust, the foolish old gentleman fell back trembling in his chair, and regarded him with wide eyes.

"What are your facts?" he faltered.

Tressillian was brutally blunt, now that he was "in for it," as he would have said.

"The woman's maiden name was Buxton, her father a Whitechapel weaver, her sisters in the ballet of the Grand Opera, her brother—by the way, he is in New York now, and might give you a call on the score of relationship by marriage, you know. He is one Bill Buxton, something of a *protege* of mine. In my country we call his sort bruisers, or pugs; here your fine gentlemen hob-and-nob with them as pugilists, sparrers, members of the fancy—faugh! a sort of human gorilla, or hog, with the tbeews of a giant, the fortitude of an anvil, the brain-pan of an Aztec. That's bully Bill, your daughter-in-law's own brother, my dear sir!"

Mr. Challoner had grown limp and pale, but, as his self-sufficiency was imperishable under any and all assaults, he managed to rally after a fashion.

"All this—or something of it—I have long known vaguely," he weakly murmured. "That is, when I have ever condescended to give the noisome subject any attention at all. Curses on that woman and her foul tribe!" He helplessly gnashed his teeth.

A stern look of mingled disgust and disapprobation came into Lord Tressillian's face, for which the concealed detective half-liked him at the moment.

"Not the woman—not your daughter-in-law, sir!" he hastily exclaimed. "It isn't fair or generous to include her with the rest. She was an angel of purity and goodness—an angelic flower of the slums, reaching heavenward for the light that was her craving and her worship! Though I only saw the injured lady a few times," Lord Tressillian used the word with pronounced respectfulness that was no less refreshing than unexpected, "I happen to know of what I speak."

Mr. Challoner was half-weeping now, though still fuming.

"She eloped with a scoundrel, and broke my son's heart!" he wailed. "She killed him, besides deserting her own children!"

"It is altogether false!" replied Tressillian, quietly. "I know the companion and circumstances of her seeming flight. Rascal he was, no doubt, and wholly unscrupulous as to his secret intentions. But the lady was utterly innocent, though temporarily and outwardly the victim of his plot."

Mr. Challoner had started up, and was leaning forward interestedly.

"You say you know this?" he asked.

"I do."

"What are, or were, the circumstances?"

"These: Mrs. Challoner had gone to London for a few days' shopping, leaving her husband, even then in failing health, and children, in Blackpool, where they had been residing happily and quietly for a number of months."

"The intention was that, on her return, they should make a sojourn at some continental health resort, it had not been determined which."

"The lady was accompanied to London by a Lieutenant Peyton, of the guards, who had become intimately friendly with both husband and wife at Blackpool, in whose faith and honor (supposing such qualities to exist in him) they had implicit confidence."

"This man, however, was a consummate scoundrel, and, though young in years, already steeped to the eyes in unscrupulous iniquity. The one saving clause in his character was that, while he had secretly conceived a violent and uncontrollable passion for the unhappy lady, he was resolved to gratify it honorably—at least in part, or according to his standards. He plotted to accomplish the separation and subsequent divorce of Mrs. Challoner from her husband, that he—Peyton was his name at that time—might make her his wife."

"Arriving in London, the lady put up at a quietly aristocratic hotel where both she and her husband were well and favorably known. Peyton stopped at his club, but daily acted as her escort on her shopping tours."

"On the morning of the fourth day, when she was intending to start for Blackpool, Mrs. Challoner received a startling and wholly unexpected telegram, purporting to be from her husband at Ostend."

"I came here with the children at an hour's notice, and without stopping to advise you," the dispatch read—I give you the exact words. 'Come at once. Have had a dangerous relapse and may not live till your arrival.' Such was the telegram."

Tressillian, who had grown grave and troubled, paused, drawing a long breath.

"You are very minute!" interposed Mr. Challoner, with a feeble sneer. "How should you know the exact words of such a dispatch?"

The answer was unexpected.

"I ought to know," in a profoundly remorseful voice. "It was I who forged and wired it!"

CHAPTER XV.

A WOMAN'S WRONGS.

"You?" gasped Mr. Challoner, catching his breath.

Lord Tressillian gravely inclined his head.

"I was in the plot to oblige Peyton," was his admission. "I have been reckless and unscrupulous since—am so now, for that matter—but I

am afraid that that is the one crime of my life that will be adjudged beyond pardon."

"Much unnerved and terrified, and doubtless supposing that her husband had thus uncere-moniously hurried abroad with the children under medical advice, or a despondent hallucination with regard to his malady, Mrs. Challoner lost no time in taking the first boat for Ostend, which was in readiness to sail from Dover almost immediately on her arrival there."

"Peyton, after advising her sympathetically, was again her escort as a matter of course."

"Why prolong the story of the unfortunate woman and her wrongs?"

"At a convenient hotel across the channel, the mask was triumphantly dropped, the *ruse* confessed, the plotting scoundrel's intentions avowed."

"Nothing else was left me, for I loved you to distraction, and now you must of necessity be mine! You cannot return to your husband if you would. The whisper of our elopement was circulated among the clubs before our departure—I took care of that, even to the intermingling of my luggage with yours on boat and pier. It was itemized, deliciously morselized, one might say, in the court and society journals of the following day. All London rings with the latest scandal in high life, and your indignant husband is ere this aware of it. You can have no shelter but in my honorable protection, for, if I love you madly, it is in all honor and respect—perhaps my first experience of the grand passion thus associated. You shall live wholly apart from me, if you will, until your husband secures his divorce, as he assuredly will at the earliest opportunity. Then we can be married here under civil law, the customs of the continent being more or less lax or non-critical in this regard. You must eventually be mine, because it is your only recourse; be mine in heart and soul, for I love you to madness, and shall love you forever!" And so on, doubtless indefinitely.

"But Peyton had reckoned without a suspicion of his prospective victim's truth and fidelity."

"She spurned him, as he deserved, with contempt, loathing and scorn. Even when finding that he had spoken truly in vaunting that her reputation was hopelessly compromised—that her asseverations as to the truth were not believed, her dispatches and letters to her husband unanswered, ignored—that her return to him and her children was not to be thought or dreamed of, her agonized heart was proof against the allurements which her villainous deceiver held out to her as her only hope of social rehabilitation."

"However, after a while the violence of her denunciations ceased; she simply refused to see him, and kept close. Then she disappeared. I am happy to say that it was with means secretly furnished by myself, and in a manner to make her deem that it was from another source, whence she could honorably accept it—for, being young then, I was conscience-stricken and conscience-shamed for the first time in my life that I can positively remember—that her evanishment was effected and Peyton hopelessly out-tricked. That is all."

"Is all this perfectly true, my lord?" Mr. Challoner demanded, in his weak, nerveless way, after a long pause.

"I'll swear to God it is!"

"What—what became of the woman?"

"How should I know? I believe it was her intention to seek a temporary asylum with some distant relative of her husband's from whom she was pretty confident of meeting with credence and protection. I only know that it was to America she flitted away with her pale face, her wrecked loveliness and her broken heart. Doubtless she is long ere this in her grave. She did not look like one who would linger long. A part from the news of her husband's speedy death, her separation would have naturally hastened her end, for the mother love seemed like the breath of life in her frame, the pulse of blood in her veins, and her mother agony in consequence must have been the refinement of mental and emotional torment, without cessation and without respite."

Mr. Challoner, who had listened from the first with owl-like solemnity but little real sympathy—his self-engrossment and shallowness were too absolute to admit of a sympathetic thrill apart from self and its belongings—was now in a meditative reverie such as caused the Englishman to study him critically.

As the latter did so, contempt curled his lip, and the expression of his own face was gradually and wholly transformed.

The ennobling light, which had been permitted to permeate it as the reflection of his remorseful narrative—doubtless sincere while it lasted, but fleeting as an April beam—was gone, and the old bold, reckless, daring and unconscionable spirit was again omnipresent in his florid comeliness and hard eyes.

He seemed to read the old man's ignoble thoughts as an open page, and to smile craftily over the perusal, as if fairly contented withal.

Mr. Challoner suddenly brightened up, and, after a nervous fluttering of his thin hands, he even snapped his fingers a little jubilantly.

"That for your secret, then, my lord!" he

chirped out, exultingly. "So this is the true story, then? Ha, ha! Sir, my granddaughter shall never be influenced by me to marry the like of you! You have drawn your own fangs with which you threatened me!"

"In what way?" inquired Tressillian, contemptuously.

"Ha! Give the story to the world, then. Why should we care? My daughter-in-law will appear in a sufficiently decent light, after all. There you are! There will be no disgrace for me, at least; the spotlessness of our scutcheon will have been maintained."

"Scutcheon" isn't half bad. Haw, haw, haw! but with a chilling shortness in the guffaw at this stage of the interview. "Challoner, my jubilant old fossil, has it never occurred to you at all what a consummate, unmitigated, natural-born blasted old fool you are?"

"Sir! sir!"

"Hold your tongue! Do you forget that this story I have told you of your daughter-in-law's wrongs and nobility, though absolutely true, is not the one that was accepted in London at the time? Don't interrupt, I tell you. That story, though a beastly fiction, still obtains there, and can be easily revived and transported to this side of the water. What does this false but generally credited story do? It blackens the wronged young lady's character unrelievedly, making her conduct appear in a thoroughly base and heartless light. And all this apart from her family antecedents, which were the woman's undeserved bane and reproach through life. Well, Mr. Challoner, what would be the effect of the spread, we will even say the printed publication, of this safe libel upon an angelic character here in New York? I do not mean particularly upon yourself—your ridiculous self-sufficiency would sustain you in any event; but upon your haughty and exclusive social set here, your vaunted Four Hundred, of which, I believe, your family is considered a known quantity, and above all upon your children and heirs, the exquisite Randolph, and the fair Gladys, whom I do admire? Think it over."

An appalled look had crept into Mr. Challoner's face.

"But that isn't the true story—it is all false and wrongful!" he exclaimed.

"Of course, it is."

"But you—you surely wouldn't keep the true story, my lord, and disseminate the false and disgraceful one?"

"Wouldn't I?" with a hard laugh. "Well, just try me, that is all."

The old gentleman fell to half-weeping again, and he wrung his hands.

"Oh, oh!" he maundered. "That would be wicked and cruel—it would disgrace us all—disgrace me!"

"I should say so! and just what I shall do, unless you come to my terms. So you see my possession of certain facts were something of a secret, after all. Eh, Grandpapa Challoner, eh?"

"What are your terms?" demanded the other, trying to be indifferent to the insulting familiarity.

"The hand in marriage of your granddaughter, Gladys Challoner," was the prompt response, "together with a stunning dowry down on the nail, in amount hereafter to be arranged, and a guaranty of her being your sole co-heir with her brother by testamentary provision!"

The old gentleman gazed at him, half-bewildered by his audacity.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DETECTIVE AGAIN SURPRISED.

"BUT I can't do what you demand my lord!" cried Mr. Challoner, appealingly, at last. "Gladys is a girl with a spirit and will of her own—the very last girl in the world to be influenced or intimidated into such a thing by any one in the world."

"Wouldn't want to marry her if she were otherwise," responded Tressillian, calmly. "All I ask is your persistent backing in the race, with the steadfast and quiet exertion of such authority as you possess over the young lady to the hymeneal end in view (I may be able to coach you with valuable suggestions in this regard from time to time) and I will take care of the sweepstakes. Is it a whack? But bless me! I beg pardon. I mean, is it an agreement, you know?"

Mr. Challoner pursed up his vain, weak little lips, and seemed to deliberate.

"Suppose I refuse?" he at length suggested, half-assertively.

Lord Tressillian shrugged his big British shoulders, and smiled rather unpleasantly.

"Ah, then," he replied, "if the whole unsavory fiction as to your daughter-in-law's misfortune, together with the equally malodorous truth as to her slummy family connections, should possibly be revived in the public prints both here and abroad, why, of course, my dear sir—"

"No, no, no! not that!" all but screamingly interrupted the other. "Good Lord! it isn't to be thought of."

"Ah, I should say not."

"And if—if I agree to your terms?"

"All serene as a summer sky!" observed his lordship, beamingly. "The whole ugly business to remain buried out of sight—all but forgotten, as heretofore. Or if you should prefer to have the unhappy lady's memory vindicated by making public the true statement of her unconscionable wrongs and sufferings, as I have given it to you—"

"No, no, no!" almost as frantically as before. "Rest, quiescence, obscurity, oblivion, nothing more! That is sufficient."

"As you please, sir," coldly, and not without contempt. "I am to understand, then, that my proposal is accepted, our agreement ratified?"

"Yes, yes, yes!" and, rising, Mr. Challoner began pacing the floor in much perturbation of such spirit as he possessed. "Oh!" helplessly, "why can't I be left alone to the seclusion of my family dignity, my rank in life, my ancestral superiority?"

This was too much for the Briton, and he haw-hawed again, while seizing his hat and grasping the Challoner immaculate hand, and pumping it vigorously, preparatory to his ending his visit.

"Good-by and God bless you, my dear grandfather-in-law!" he cried, even venturing upon a familiar slap between the Challoner shoulder-blades. "Gad! I feel as if our tie were consummated already, with bridal joys and perhaps a timely christening in the prospective. By-bye for the present, at all events!"

But when half-way out of the room, Tressillian returned to his half-stupefied host, his fair, reckless forehead wearing a thoughtful look.

"Something occurs to me, my dear old boy," he said, lowering his voice. "There isn't any other fellow in my way, I hope?"

"Other fellow! what other fellow? in whose way? What do you mean, Lord Tressillian?"

"The deuce! I haven't a rival to fear in my pursuit of Miss Challoner's hand, I hope?"

"Oh! Well, not that I know of. At least, it isn't likely that there is any other—now."

"So!" suspiciously. "But there was, or might have been, in the past?"

"Tut, tut, yes! I believe so. But I have forbidden the rascal my house. He sunk his fortune in wild-goose ventures—some of them of a charitable or humanitarian nature, I believe—faugh!—got as poor as a church-mouse, and even went to working for his living in some outlandish vocation, I have understood. Not worthy of a thought—outside our lines altogether!"

Still Tressillian had listened gravely.

"Outlandish vocation!" he repeated, with a slight start. "What sort of vocation?"

"What difference can it make?" peevishly. "Some sort of detective, I believe."

"Not Wellborn?" exclaimed Lord Tressillian, with sudden vehemence.

"Let be, let be, if you please! Yes; that's the fellow. Not to be thought of, I tell you! Deliberately stepped down out of our heights into the mud of employment, usefulness, commonplace—pah!"

"Oh, bosh!" cried Lord Tressillian, impatiently.

"Sir, sir? What is that you say, and to me?"

"Drop it! Had Miss Challoner ever betrayed any sentiment for this young-gentleman?"

reluctantly, but with a sullen generosity withheld.

"Perhaps, so—very like—I don't know. Don't I tell you that the fellow is long since forbidden my house?"

"Well, by-by, grandpapa-in-law!" with an abrupt return to the rollicking tone and air. "Don't forget your authority and how it is to be exerted." And this time his lordship was really up and away.

A few moments later, Mr. Challoner likewise quitted the library.

Waltzing Wellborn was straightening himself up from his loag listening vigil on the other side of the portiere.

Suddenly a trembling grasp was laid on his shoulder, and there was an excited feminine voice in his ear.

"Don't you tell Gladys—the young lady, I mean!" it exclaimed, half-beseechingly, half-commandingly. "Don't dare to tell her what was said of her mother, young man! It would all but kill her."

Mark rose and turned to recognize, with no little surprise, Aunt Betsey Warder, the spectacled and ordinarily taciturn, undemonstrative housekeeper in the speaker.

"What, Mrs. Warder, it is you?" he exclaimed.

She nodded, drawing back, and, though still agitated, slowly recovering her composure.

"Of course, I sha'n't tell her," he continued, still with his puzzled air. "But how and why are you here, ma'am?"

She mumbled something of Gladys having grown weary waiting and temporarily quitting the little reception-room, and to her own yielding to an uncontrollable curiosity to know what was going on in the library.

Then, holding up her finger warningly, or appealingly, she preceded him into the adjoining room.

There, still partly facing him somewhat piteously, she noiselessly unlocked and disappeared by the hall door, after receiving a reassuring

nod from him, as much as to say, "All right, I sha'n't tell all; and this intrusion of yours sha'n't be mentioned."

Then, entering the smaller room beyond, Gladys herself, apparently newly returned after a temporary absence, hurried toward him.

"You were so long," she exclaimed, "that I couldn't remain quietly in one place. Where is Aunt Betsey, I wonder? However, it doesn't matter. What have you got to tell me, Mark?"

"Oh, more than enough, no doubt," he answered, as they took their seats at the fire. "The interview was a protracted one, as you say."

"Yes, yes; but the result, my friend? You must see how suspenseful I am."

"Naturally enough. The result? Lord Tressillian has succeeded in re-enlisting your grandfather, body and soul, in behalf of his suit for your hand and prospective check-book, for it seems that the old gentleman had been more than half inclined to draw out from his interest. That is the gist of the whole thing."

"That is nothing!" impatiently. "I could have anticipated that. The secret of his power over my grandfather? That is what I want to know."

"The particulars of their long confab could hardly interest you, Gladys. And as for Lord Tressillian's secret of power—well, I fancy it is nothing more than nature's power, the wizardry that a powerful and forceful individuality must ever exercise over a weaker."

She was regarding him gravely and reproachfully.

"You are practicing evasion upon me, Mark!" she said, with cold displeasure. "Of course," her lip curled tremulously, "it was to learn just this much—which is nothing at all—that you undertook my request to overhear them!"

"But you are altogether too hasty, Gladys," he persisted, though with yet more indifferent success. "You see, the fact isn't to be blinked that Tressillian is no ordinary man in brains—yes, and in a sort of brutal manliness, too, as I am bound to bear witness—in spite of his utter unconscionableness; while your grandfather—Mr. Challoner—well he isn't extraordinary in any way, to say the least. Therefore, when the weight and force of one such man is brought to bear against the—want of both such qualities in the other, it naturally follows—"

Here he paused again, under the steady reproachfulness of her gaze, in an inextricable confusion with which no one else could have inspired him.

"Oh, Mark! you to attempt to deceive me, after what we once were to—to—"

And then she lowered her eyes, overcome by even a worse confusion than his own.

Wellborn, flushed and with a wildly beating heart, was on his feet instantly, while Gladys also tremblingly rose, drooping her face.

"Oh, heavens, if I thought that that tenderness of the past might be still dear to you!" he exclaimed, huskily. "You whom I still love so madly, so hopelessly, now that I am ostracized and poor!"

"Oh, Mark, Mark, Mark!" was all that she could murmur, and with a delicious lingering upon the name.

The next instant she was in his arms, his kisses raining unopposedly upon her blushing face.

CHAPTER XVII.

"THE OLD SWEET STORY."

THESE two had loved each other from the first, and it was only now that the pure rivers of their passion thus mingled at last in the caress that made them one.

"The old, sweet story,
That time can ne'er make hoary,
With true-love homeward bound!
True-love's golden glory,
The old, sweet story,
While the world turns round!"

The first transports of their new great joy permitting a return of sense and speech, they could still think of their mutual love and that alone.

"How strangely it came about!" murmured Gladys at last, gently disengaging herself and resuming her seat. "That will do, Mark. Let us be sensible, if we can."

"But I can't—at least not just yet awhile!" cried Mark, bringing his chair much closer to hers. "To think of your really caring for me all this time!"

"And you to have doubted me!"

"But wasn't every one else giving me the cold shoulder? Wasn't the loss of my fortune looked upon as little less than a crime? And then when your grandfather so brutally, so preposterously—"

Her hand was across his lips.

"But I am not my grandfather, Mark!"

"I should say not, or anything like him, God be praised! But still my having to earn my livelihood in this way—"

"What if I like you all the better for it?"

"Noble girl!"

"I am so happy, Mark!"

Another embrace, and fresh transports, which, if not wholly indescribable in a prosaic tale such

is this, are best left to the reader's imagination. Then there was an end to evasion. Mark told her the entire story of the overheard interview, not even omitting the housekeeper's intrusion, nor the incident with Pinchet, the valet.

Much to his satisfaction, Gladys received the revelation with regard to her mother's history with more composure than might have been expected.

"Poor old Aunt Betsey!" was her first comment—doubtless more to conceal her deeper stir of feelings than aught else; "her sympathizing thought of sparing me distress shall not be forgotten, and I will not let her suspect that I know of it. But that spying on the part of Pinchet! I must put Ran on his guard."

"Only in a general way, let me advise," the detective interposed. "I have told you of the exposure to which I subjected the rascal. He will both respect and fear me hereafter. Therefore, I would only hint, if I were you, my darling, that the valet was formerly in Tressillian's employ, and is presumably not to be trusted."

"I shall follow your advice implicitly, Mark."

Then there was a long and somewhat awkward pause, during which Gladys was pondering over her mother's sad story, and Mark was sympathizing with her distress without knowing how to relieve it.

"There is to be nothing but absolute confidence between us in the future, dear?" he at last ventured.

The sorrowfully eloquent glance that she lifted to him in response was sufficient.

"You were thinking of your poor mother?" he gently continued.

"Of course, of course!" with something like a sob, though a bravely repressed one. "Ah! of what else could I think?"

"Control yourself, if you can. She was a vilely-maligned, hideously-wronged woman! Let us try to discuss the painful subject dispassionately."

"Well, then!" And Gladys looked up bravely through her crushed-back tears.

"Of course, you must have known something of this sad story all along!"

"Yes; though vaguely, and only from what my brother could or would remember of the scandal. You know he must have been a lad of seven or eight when it occurred."

"True." "But it was only the lying, the libelous story," her eyes flashed, "that I received hints of, and our father's belief in which most likely hastened his death! As for this true statement which this man has vouchsafed—oh, I could almost forgive him the past for the remorseful eloquence with which you have reproduced it from his lips, unprincipled scoundrel as he still remains! You will forgive my saying this, dearest?"

"Nothing to forgive! I felt half-like patting him on the back for his manliness at the time, notwithstanding the self-confessed part he bore in the villainous plot, and the cold-blooded manner in which he repudiated the truth in the end. Pardon me for saying it, but Mr. Challoner's reception of the truth was much more criticisable by comparison."

"Of course, of course!" hurriedly. "Please don't speak of grandpapa more than you can help, Mark."

"Certainly not. I shouldn't have even referred to him."

"What do you think of it all, Mark?"

"You mean with respect to your poor mother?"

"Yes. Of course, grandpapa's supposed influence with me in Lord Tressillian's favor is too absurd for a second thought."

"Still," observed Wellborn, doubtfully, "Tressillian is no fool, and he seemed to think, indeed to be quite confident, that it might be exerted to his satisfaction."

"Then it is because he is intending to supplement the move by some fresh plot of his own."

"Possibly." And Mark's brow darkened.

"Which," she went on, with a faint smile, "would, or should, be equally useless. For are not you now my champion, not merely as a detective, but—"

Mark could not abstain from interrupting her with yet another lover-like kiss and embrace.

"Well, then, as to the other matter altogether," he said, at last. "But first let me ask if we are safe from interruption here?"

"Oh, with hardly a doubt. Grandpapa must have gone out for his forenoon drive soon after his visitor's departure. It was even then past his hour."

"Good! for, of course, it would not be agreeable or politic for me to come in contact with him. Now let me see; what is your first and paramount desire in this matter, Glad?"

"To vindicate," was the prompt and passionate answer, "my mother's memory by giving that true story of her wrongs, duly authenticated, to the world!"

"Bravely spoken, my darling! but, of course, it could only be so authenticated, so far as I can see, by Tressillian himself."

"True, true!" helplessly; "and of course that would be to give up what he must consider his chief winning-card in his designs upon my hand, besides making him stand, self-confessed, as the villain Peyton's accomplice in the cowardly plot."

"That last objection wouldn't weigh upon him a hair's breadth, for he is wholly without shame. Let me make a digression with a brief story. You know of the notorious woman De Vavasour, as she called herself after her exposure?"

"I should say so! And to think of her being at Lady Bannington's last night under a fresh *nom de guerre*, to the scandal and mystification of half the ladies present!"

"Thereby hangs my tale." And he forthwith related his last experience with the enterprising adventuress.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Gladys. "Then poor Lady Bannington also seems one of the unfortunates for an unscrupulous person to have a secret hold upon her?"

"It would seem so, but let that pass, if you will, at my special request. I merely introduce the woman's character now to say that her relations with Lord Tressillian have long been and still are of an intimate and confidential nature. She was temporarily on the variety stage, and he 'put up for her,' as the saying goes. Moreover, the woman's real name may be of painful importance to you, or I wouldn't have considered her in this matter at all."

"To me?"

"Yes—in this connection with your mother's history."

"What is her real name?"

"Her real name by marriage is—Buxton."

Gladys paled, but remained composed.

"It was my poor mamma's maiden name," she said, in a low voice.

"Yes; she is the wife of a noted British bruiser, one Bill Buxton, now in this city, and also under his sporting lordship's protection."

"Go on," with a brave but bitter calmness; "doubtless a maternal uncle of my own."

"Yes, but never mind that." Mark took her hand and pressed it reassuringly. "I merely wish to tell you all this that you may perceive how strangely Tressillian is mixed up, though perhaps indirectly, with your unhappy mother's belongings. Now, I have this to say of a more cheering nature. The succinctness with which he made the true statement of the lady's wrongs to your grandfather impressed me with the notion that he must have committed the story to paper. Should that prove to be the case, and we could get hold of the writing—perhaps formally prepared and duly attested—it would be a capital means not only of destroying his present hopes beyond retrieval, but also of bringing old Mr. Challoner to our terms, through his fear that we might revive the story of what he regards his family disgrace by giving it to the world."

Gladys had looked up hopefully, but with a different expression as he concluded.

"But I would do that in any event!" she exclaimed, indignantly. "My mother's memory should be vindicated on the spot, and before all the world, whether grandpapa should like it or not."

He gazed at her admiringly.

"That would perhaps cost you your heirship—perhaps reduce you to poverty, Gladys."

She turned to him with a brilliant smile.

"Would you object sharing even that with me, Mark?"

He opened his arms, and she was once more on his breast.

The opening of the door, and an astounded exclamation, caused them to separate in confusion.

Old Mr. Challoner confronted them.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN EVENTFUL DAY.

BUT Gladys Challoner was a rare young woman, who was equal to almost any social emergency, however embarrassing.

She quickly recovered her composure, smiled upon her grandfather very sweetly, and took her lover's hand.

"Dear grandpapa," she said, "you must remember our old friend, Mr. Wellborn. Or, if he may have escaped your mind, let me introduce him afresh as my affianced husband."

The old gentleman, who had remained looking at them with a half-furious, half-appalled look, gave a shrill, inarticulate cry, and sunk trembling into a seat.

"Child, you are mad!" he at last managed to exclaim. "And as for you, sir," he turned upon her companion with a puerile fury that was rather pitiable than otherwise, "how dare you come here, after being expressly forbidden my house?"

"Do not reply, Mark." Gladys held up her hand. "My grandfather is apparently not himself, and seems to forget the courtesy that is due to me, no less than to you as my dearest friend." And she said with her eyes: "Go now, it is best; we can readily arrange meetings for the future."

Wellborn hesitated, then gravely raised her

hand to his lips, and, with a silent obeisance to the old gentleman, took his departure without further ceremony.

As he was proceeding down the avenue, a handsome woman bowed genially—a little triumphantly, too, perhaps—to him from a brilliant open equipage that was sweeping past in the clear sunshine behind a pair of spirited bays, with a richly livered English coachman at the reins.

It was Lady Bannington, and as Mark lifted his hat in response, the gentleman at her side—none other than Randolph Challoner, and looking rather contented in the bargain—also nodded pleasantly.

"Her ladyship isn't losing opportunities, it seems," observed the Society Detective to himself. "And I, for one, wouldn't mind if she might hook her fish in the end; for she is doubtless a fine woman, and Ran, while not more than a dozen years her junior, isn't a bad fellow in his way, in spite of his caddish pride at times."

Altogether, it was destined to prove a rather eventful day for our Upper-Crust Detective.

As it was past noon, it occurred to him to go to his boarding-house for lunch, by way of a change, no less than to save the price of a downtown repast.

No sooner did he enter the house than handsome and redundant Mrs. Le Duke, who was descending the stairs, impressively seized him by the hand, while he remarked that she was in a state of somewhat tearful excitement.

"Sir—Mr. Wellborn!" she murmured, "there is news for you—perhaps dreadful news. Come into the back parlor here, if you please. You can have your lunch when you please, we shall not be disturbed, and—I must speak to you!"

"Nonsense!" growled Mark, who was used to and not a little wearied of his landlady's moods, but following her notwithstanding through the door, which she rather tragically closed behind them; "what dreadful news have you for my paralyzation this time, pray? Has my laundress ripped another of my shirt-fronts?"

She confronted him emotionally.

"Do not jest, sir!" she exclaimed, with profound reproach. "A woman has been here inquiring for you—a woman—and she left a note for you."

"Yes, yes; let me have it, then."

She obeyed with a heaving breast and falling tears.

The note was a misspelled scrawl from Polly to the effect that her good-for-nothing bruiser of a husband was making trouble for her, and wouldn't let the detective call at her address, which was duly given, for the particulars.

"That's all right!" commented the young man thrusting the note in his pocket. "Many thanks, ma'am!"

To his astonishment, Mrs. Le Duke suddenly fell upon his neck with a torrent of tears, pressing him wildly to her bosom; and, as she weighed over two hundred, the demonstration was just that more embarrassing.

"What in heaven's name ails you?" cried Wellborn, angrily releasing himself.

"You won't marry her?" wailed the widow, clasping her hands and stretching them out in a wild appeal. "Tell me that, Mr. Wellborn—Mark—my Mark! give me that assurance. Think of what I've done for ye, how I love ye, what I've been to ye—darned your socks, looked after your washin', made over your rumpled neck-wear, laid out your dress-suit, ready brushed! Besides that, she ben't no spring chicken, even if I ben't. Tell me you don't love the blonde hussy, sir—that my darker but truer charms hain't a-palling onto you! Say that you won't marry her—only say it!"

"Stop your bawling, you ridiculous old woman!" exclaimed Mark, still more incensed. "If you persist in making such a fool of yourself, I shall seek accommodations elsewhere, never to return. Stop it, I say! No, then, if you must have it; I haven't the wildest notion of marrying the woman."

He flung himself out of the parlor, heedless of her having lurched into a window-niche, with a new hopelessness in her face, and the cruel words "ridiculous old woman" hovering in repetition on her writhing lips, and forthwith went down to his lunch, where, a few minutes later strange to say, she was agreeably attending to the meridian wants of her boarders, his own included, with such genial and every-day complaisance—barring an occasional pathetic glance in his direction, perhaps—as if her melodramatic outburst had never been.

Indeed, notwithstanding that this last specimen had been somewhat beyond the limits, Wellborn had long since come to regard these impulsive manifestations as perhaps an emotional necessity with the good woman, and he presently quitted the house with no further recollection of the affair on his own part.

On his way down-town to the adventuress's address, he was so fortunate (or the reverse, as the case might prove) as to perceive her, very elegantly attired, trying to avoid an altercation with her bugbear of a husband on a side-street, but luckily as yet without attracting public attention.

"Here, my man, this won't do!" said the detective, decisively, and he peremptorily inter-

posed. "This woman is under my protection for the nonce, and you must not annoy her."

The burly Cockney fairly drew back on recognizing the new arrival, but sullenly, and with his huge fists half-clinched.

"She's my 'ooman, Pol, that's what she be!" he growled, his beady little eyes blinking angrily but prudently from beneath his beetling brows. "And H'd like to know as 'ow you 'ave hany right to interfere betwixt man and wife!"

"No matter; be off with you, or I'll give you in charge! Go on!"

Buxton did as he was ordered, but wagging his head mutinously, like an ill-conditioned mastiff suddenly bereft of a favorite bone.

The ex-barnaid had recovered her *grande dame* air instantly, and was regarding her rescuer with unqualified admiration.

"How beautifully you did it!" she exclaimed, smilingly. "Even Lord Tressillian would have thought twice before crossing Bruiser Buxton quite so unceremoniously. But then he admitted to me some time ago that you had thrashed him."

"I got your note," said Mark, curtly enough. "Where can I have a brief talk with you?"

"My hotel is on the next block."

"That won't do—for me." He considered a moment, adding: "Come with me."

CHAPTER XIX.

AN EVENTFUL DAY, CONTINUED.

WELLBORN led the way, or escorted his companion after a fashion, to a small but reputable French restaurant not far away, where a *cabinet particulier*, or small private eating-room, was secured.

"I suppose, of course, you'll have some wine, countess?" he queried.

She accompanied her answer with a smile that had something really good and honest in it.

"Certainly, Herr Wellborn, if you will drink with me, and let me order what I choose."

"What shall it be, Polly?"

"A bottle of three-shilling table claret and some biscuits. I know you're not rich, and the water already in the stuff will do neither of us any harm."

"Pshaw! I can always afford something better than that."

"That, or nothing, my dear."

So the wine was brought, and the detective's opinion of the adventuress was already bettering, as she doubtless intended it should do.

"You may help me out, Polly," said Wellborn, at last, "and perhaps not inconsiderably, in a certain affair."

"I'm glad to know it," replied the ex-barnaid, crunching a cracker between her superb teeth, and taking a sip of her wine.

"Honestly?" he eyed her searchingly.

"There's my hand on it!" She frankly extended her large but white and beautifully shaped ungloved hand, glittering with rings, across the table to him. "What more do you want, Mr. Wellborn?"

"Certainly. I must first be sure that you treasure no resentment against me, at least."

"Resentment? Why, it was nothing but your duty to block my game twice, as you have done, and you kindly stood between me and my deserved punishment each time! And can I forget how Bully Bill slunk away from your mere frown ten minutes ago, any more than I can forget the many a welt and bruise I had from him, with no one to take my part, in the White Chapel and Shoreditch days? Resentment, indeed! But why don't you drink of your red water, my dear? I'll even make love to you if you wish it."

"No, thank you, Polly," laughing at the infection of her own laugh, which had rung out, honest and clear. "But I'll tell you frankly, this affair of mine is against Tressillian, who is still, I suppose—er—something of a friend of yours."

"Not by a long shot, my love! Was, not is! I could have got a concert-singing engagement with the London Polly Company, at the Third Avenue, only last week, with his backing, but he refused it. As it is, I have even a better opening for a fortnight hence with the Gayeties Troupe, and through my unaided exertions. Besides, why should he have brought Buxton over here, of all hulking brutes in the world, just for the chance of making a few guineas out of him, and knowing the annoyance it would necessarily cause me? There you are, Mr. Wellborn, and I hope you like my recommendation."

"Well, I'll risk it, Polly. Listen: Have you ever heard of an atrocious London scandal connected with—"

"Wait a minute!" She gravely held up her hand. "Any woman having any sort of an *entree* among your upper-crusts could see at a glance that you are over ears in love with Miss Challoner, and it is her unfortunate mother you refer to."

"Polly, you are a very clever woman."

"No, I'm not, Mr. Wellborn; but fairly penetrative and no more. Yes, then, I remember

distinctly. Not the least of the unhappy lady's misfortunes was her having a brute like my husband for an own brother and even the rest of the girls were of mighty little good, I've been told."

"A deeply wronged lady that, Polly!"

"I believe you."

"But you could have learned nothing save through the common report of years ago, that so misrepresented and maligned her."

"You mistake, my dear. There is the truthful story, on her own side of the case, that is known to but few, Lord Tressillian among the number. And I make no bones of having been on intimate business terms with that gambler in the past, is I am ashamed of him now. I often heard him hint of the lady having been most foully wronged, even as if it were a matter of remorseful conscience with himself, though always guardedly enough, I can tell you."

Wellborn eagerly caught at the suggestion.

"What, have you so, Polly?" he exclaimed, eagerly.

"It's the truth, Mr. Wellborn."

"Listen, Polly! Might Tressillian, by any chance, think you, have committed the truth of that miserable affair to writing?"

"Let me think." And she did seem to think hard, while regarding him gravely with the great blue eyes of hers that might be so honest, and yet were probably not. And then she asked, somewhat suspiciously, after a long pause: "Why are you so keen over this thing, Mr. Wellborn?"

"Keen?" he echoed, disappointedly. "Have n't you already divined that I love Gladys Challoner?"

But she shook her head.

"The young lady must have been a baby at the time, and could now have no wish to investigate the matter, unless under new and strong prompting."

Wellborn hesitated, but thought the matter over in all its bearings, and finally concluded to risk making this woman his confidante, so far as Tressillian's plot for Gladys's hand and fortune was concerned.

He accordingly did so, with scarcely any reservation whatever.

Adventuress as Polly Buxton was to the core, there was a good deal of true womanliness left in her yet.

She listened in astonishment at first, and then with serious, growing interest.

"Miss Challoner," she said, quietly, when he had concluded, "is too fine a creature to be sacrificed to such a man as Lionel Tressillian—notwithstanding that he is not without certain fine qualities in his way. You can command my services in any way you choose in this complication, Mr. Wellborn."

"You really mean that, Polly?"

"On my woman's word, I do!" And there was the ring of sincerity in her words and manner.

"Good! good! Now, if he might only have committed this truth circumstantially to paper—a writing sufficiently authenticated, you understand—and we could but get possession of it!"

"Set your mind at rest, my dear. There is just such a paper, or papers—I am morally sure of it—and I will do what I can."

"What!" cried the detective, joyfully; "it seems too good to be true."

"Leave the matter to me, Mr. Wellborn. Tell me where I can meet you, say to-morrow, and in the mean time, I will see how the land lies."

The appointment was accordingly made, and after a few more exchanges, they separated.

Wellborn was next proceeding in a very improved frame of mind to the fashionable athletic club, of which he had continued to remain a member, and whose headquarters were not far away, while, in the very vestibule of the building, he chanced to encounter Lord Tressillian.

The latter was accompanied by his inseparable, or ancient, as you might say, Mr. H. Peyton Weymouth, and there was a look in his face as if he had perceived and awaited the detective's approach.

Quitting his companion, Lord Tressillian now stepped up to Wellborn, saying in a low voice, but with marked respectfulness and even dignity of manner and address:

"Sir, of your courtesy I would beg a few private words with you in the *salle d'armes*" (fencing-room).

"At your service, sir," replied the Society Detective, impassively, though secretly not a little puzzled as to his lordship's intentions.

They ascended to the large fencing-room, which chanced to be vacant save for the presence of one of the professors, a Signor Montaldi, who was refurbishing up a pair of foils in one of the windows, and seemed to not heed their entrance.

"Sir," continued Lord Tressillian, as politely as before, though with a metallic hardness in his tone, "I have but recently discovered that I have in you what I cannot brook—a rival in love. If the affair can be arranged to outwit the law, how would you like to fight a duel with me at this moment, here on this spot, and to the death?"

CHAPTER XX.

THE MASKED DUEL.

NOTHING could have been more welcome to Mark Wellborn, under really auspicious circumstances, than this strange proposition of Lord Tressillian's.

As it was, however, he merely smiled, and elevated his brows incredulously.

"Are you in earnest?" he first inquired.

"Absolutely so, sir!" was the serious reply, accompanied by a grave bow.

"But I can scarcely credit that you are, my lord. How could such a duel as you propose be so arranged as to evade the law?"

"I will cheerfully tell you, sir, since you are so circumspectly particular, and—"

"Stop, sir, if you please!" haughtily. "Pray understand at the outset that, if it can be so provided and arranged, I am your man on the spot."

"Thank you, Mr. Wellborn; it rejoices me to hear such gallant words from you!" and Tressillian looked as if he meant what he said. "Listen to me, then. You doubtless know that gentleman yonder as well as I do?"

"Professor Montaldi? Of course."

"He has been suborned by me—'fixed,' as you Americans sometimes say."

"Ah, indeed; and to what end?"

"One pair of the fencing foils belonging to this club's collection are not so harmless as they look. They are regular dueling rapiers, the buttons of which are but sham-guards over their steel points. At the first pressure of a thrust, they disappear, or are pierced, and the naked, deadly point is not in the least prevented from piercing home in reality—and perhaps with a vengeance."

While these words were being uttered, though somewhat guardedly, the fencing-master, whose hearing was exceptionally acute, managed, without Lord Tressillian's knowledge, to throw the detective a swift glance and smile.

Now it, moreover, chanced that the latter had done Signor Montaldi a signal service, not long before, in extricating a younger brother of his out of a forged-check entanglement, which might have meant the State Prison for the youth, which rendered the professor exceedingly grateful, and both that glance and smile signified to Wellborn's keen perception, as plainly as speech itself, just this: "Make it a go; if he has fixed me, I have fixed him," by which he understood that the foils in question would not have been rendered as deadly as his lordship imagined.

"A good idea!" commented Mark, in reply, with a coolness which, it is but just for him to say, would have been the same even without the professor's well-intended signal preceding it. "In fact, a very good idea!"

"Aw! glad you take to it," continued Tressillian, dryly. "You will thus perceive, sir, that, even with any number of witnesses present—and at present we yet more fortunately chance to be alone—such a duel may readily be in earnest and to the death, under the disguise of being a mere *coup d'escrime*, or fencing bout for the superiority."

"I do, I do, sir! admirable! Let us to it at once, for the more privacy the better. And, should the foils fail us, there is the pistol gallery yonder to help us out, if its appliances may be as conveniently arranged."

"As you will, sir," replied Tressillian, with a hard smile, "but the false-buttoned rapiers will doubtless prove sufficient—one way or another."

He was justly reckoned the best amateur fencer in New York, while Wellborn's skill with the foils was decent, but of lesser note.

"Professor!" called out his lordship, while both began preparing for the masked duel as thus cunningly arranged; "the foils, if you please. Mr. Wellborn and I are about to indulge in a friendly passage-at-arms."

The signor smilingly advanced with the foils that he had just been manipulating.

"At your service, gentlemen," he replied, in his soft Italian accent. "Here," exchanging a swift glance with Tressillian, "are doubtless the truest foils in our collections."

By this time both contestants had divested themselves of their coats, waistcoats, collars and cuffs.

But here there were steps heard ascending the stairs, and two witnesses—Randolph Challoner and Mr. Weymouth, the one preceding the other, entered upon the scene.

The former slightly scowled upon perceiving Tressillian, and then, observing the preparations, grew interested.

His own presence was wholly fortuitous, while that of the Englishman, who was in his lordship's secret, but had been enjoined not to appear, save in case of there being other intruders, had simply been prompted by the former.

Tressillian had also scowled, in response to Randolph's scowl, but that was all; though, but for policy's sake, he would much rather, in recollection of the knock-down blow he had once received, have had Gladys's brother than her lover as his contestant.

However, by-gones had thus far been permitted to rest as by-gones, for sundry reasons on both sides.

Tressillian's face, though, lighted up, while taking a foil, after signing his adversary to a first choice.

"A good idea!" he cried. "Mr. Wellborn, there is your friend, and yonder mine. Let each of us be regularly seconded just as if this friendly bout were with naked points and in dead earnest. What do you say?"

"With all my heart!" replied Mark, gayly. "What do you say, Ran?"

The latter had apparently no objection, and, after divesting himself of his overcoat, took a position behind the detective, while Weymouth, with a grin, imitated his example with respect to his compatriot.

Meantime, with folded arms and a peculiarly inscrutable smile lurking under the shadows of his black mustache, the fencing-master was a deeply interested looker-on, or something of a master of ceremonies, as you might say.

It was probably such a duel as might have been arranged in the old dueling days, but was otherwise altogether unique under the circumstances.

A duel thus thinly masked, but unto the death, and with only the principals and one of the seconds in the secret as to its deadliness, at the latter end of the nineteenth century, in broad day and amid the roar of busy New York!

It well might have seemed a striking anomaly both in place and time, no less than as to its environments and its intrinsic nature.

As half-stripped for the fray, the contestants presented a marked contrast to one another—the one slender and somewhat undersized, though close-knit, and with every motion instinct with gliding athletic grace; the other superbly representative of the human animal in its Anglo-Saxon type—fair-haired, florid-skinned and confident-featured, powerfully large-framed, and nobly proportioned, and yet both wearing the smile of easy composure and self-reliance.

Not a word was spoken as they stood confronting each other, with their buttoned swords' points lowered, until Tressillian said, calmly:

"When Mr. Wellborn indicates that he is ready, Professor Montaldi, you can give the word."

"I am quite ready now," quickly responded the Society Detective.

The word was given, and the blades crossed with a simultaneous flash.

At first Tressillian's superiority of wrist and skill was baffled by the gliding and catlike activity of his younger and more agile opponent, so much so, indeed, as to prove trying to the Englishman's temper.

"I must compliment you, sir, on your ball-room tactics!" sarcastically observed the latter, when the respite for breathing-space was called. "One does not obtain the reputation as the best waltzer in New York for nothing."

"Perhaps not, my lord," was the smiling reply, "but if the waltzer can compel a rival," with significant emphasis, "to dance to the tune of his own choosing, what then?"

"Are you sufficiently breathed, sir?" impatiently.

"Always at your service, my lord."

Again the swords crossed.

There was a sudden and fierce exchange, during which Wellborn's blade was finally overreached, his opponent's buttoned point striking him a hard thrust full in the left breast, and even, to all appearances, entering it several inches, the pierced button sliding back upon the blade the length of the thrust.

As the weapon was withdrawn, the Society Detective sunk to the floor, his shirt-front slowly reddening with blood over and around the wound.

"Heavens!" cried Randolph, with an oath, as he sprang to support his fallen friend; "accident or treachery somewhere! It's a real wound!"

Tressillian was examining his reddened blade, whose pierced button seemed to have slipped back almost to the point immediately upon the latter being withdrawn, with an air and some words of excellently counterfeited consternation.

But Weymouth, who was both pale and exultant, hurriedly seized his shoulder.

"Hasten, my lord!" he exclaimed, shaking him; "we must fly. A surgeon can be notified on our way hence."

Tressillian glanced but one eager, inquisitive glance at the white face of his prostrate rival, and then complied, hastily resuming his discarded garments with his friend's assistance, without a word.

But as they were hurrying down the stairs together, he was heard to say distinctly:

"He is surely done for! The blade was shortened fully four inches in my hand, and it entered directly under the heart."

Mark was very white, indeed, from loss of blood, though still smiling.

To Randolph's mystification, Signor Montaldi, who was now also at the fallen man's side, said, quite indifferently:

"It is next to nothing. Signor Challoner, may I request you to close and bolt the staircase door temporarily? Signor Wellborn is merely scratched."

"Scratched?" echoed Randolph, in amazement, for he had also been deceived by actual observation as to the depth of the thrust.

Nevertheless, he did as he was requested, and, brief as was his absence, on his return the professor had opened Wellborn's shirt, to the revelation of a still slightly-bleeding but quite insignificant wound over the heart.

CHAPTER XXI.

LATER ON.

In fact, Mark was already sitting up, though still pale, and the professor, having deftly succeeded in stifling the blood-flow, was now covering the puncture with a large square of court-plaster.

"Nothing more will be necessary," the latter explained. "Less than half an inch deep, the scratch will speedily heal."

"Less than half an inch?" again echoed young Challoner. "Why I saw with my own eyes the button slide back at least five inches on the foil, and as many of the blade-point enter the flesh!"

"All an optical illusion, my dear fellow!" observed Wellborn, with a smile. "Signor Montaldi tipped me the trick, and will doubtless explain it to you. As you are in our confidence, though by the sheerest accident, he has my permission to do so."

He thereupon got upon his feet, a little feebly at first, but with steadily increasing firmness, and leisurely proceeded to resume his discarded garments.

"Examine one, or both the foils, for that matter, signor," observed Montaldi, taking up the one with which the thrust had been made, by way of illustrating its mechanism to Randolph. "See; the button is pierced, it is true, but not more than half an inch up from the point."

Randolph scratched his head.

"But the entire blade," he persisted, "was shortened fully five inches at the instant of the lunge—I'd swear to it!"

"Obviously, but—at the other end! See; thus," and, grasping the foil-blade midway with his disengaged hand, the professor caused the upper part of it to noiselessly disappear to the extent of several inches up into the hilt. "Presto! there we are, signor. The other foil is, of course, the same. The slightest pressure at the point is sufficient to cause the blade to thus shrink back into the handle, and, the pressure being relieved, it noiselessly returns to its full visibility of length. A device of my own. I have had the foils for many years."

"But could Tressillian have known of this?"

"By no means, but merely imagined that the deception lay in the insecurity of the button alone. His object was to kill, and he deemed he had suborned my cunning to that devilish end. But, signor, apart from Signor Wellborn having once earned my gratitude by rendering me a signal kindly service, I am not an assassin, nor an assassin's hireling, though a poor man."

"Humph!" Randolph was not yet quite over his bewilderment.

"And signors," Montaldi addressed them both now, "I think I can venture to retain the English milord's guineas with a safe conscience. However, should the milord be of contrary opinion and seek satisfaction of me," he touched his breast with a smile, and slightly shrugged his shoulders—"ah, well then, signors, it may be that I shall be wholly at his service, and he can make sure of the weapons beforehand."

Here Mark grasped the signor's hand, saying:

"My dear Montaldi; you have more than requited any service I may have rendered you in the past. But it behooves my plans that his lordship should deem me dead for at least a day or two. You must still assist me to that end, if you will."

"Certainly, signor. Yonder is the little private card-room, in which you can lock yourself, and remain undisturbed till dark. After that, you should have no difficulty in slipping out of the club building unperceived. Leave the rest to me. But by the way, signor, shouldn't a whisper of the affair—the presumed fatality, I mean—be given out quietly among the members, without letting the newspapers into the secret?"

"Yes," replied Wellborn, after a moment's reflection; and then, followed by young Challoner, he vanished into the cabinet indicated. And none too soon either, for numerous steps were on the stair, and now with the approach of dusk various of the club members began to arrive for their accustomed lessons or exercise with the foils. "You see," he explained to his companion, somewhat abstractedly while securing the door behind them. "I shall have a better chance of completely upsetting Tressillian's calculations in this way; and I must see Gladys secretly, or you can carry the true story to her, for that matter, in order to forestall any alarm she might feel on my account."

As they seated themselves at a little table, where they were wholly out of earshot of the *Salles des armes*, Randolph stared at him blankly.

"What the deuce are you raving about, Mark?" he demanded, almost roughly.

"Ah, I had forgotten," replied Wellborn, slowly. "Ran," he eyed the other steadily, but

also a little quizzingly, "you and I have not been quite the same to each other as we were before I lost—as we were in the old careless, or care-free days, eh?"

"Fiddlesticks!" grumbled Ran, flushing up half-guiltily. "Doubtless all your imagination or over-sensitiveness, old fellow!"

"Perhaps so, but there is much I have to tell you, my boy. Can you imagine, for instance, why Tressillian bantered me into this duel, in which he quite made sure to kill me; as, in fact, he was manly enough to almost declare outright?"

"What! he gave you an equal chance by acquainting you with the nature of the foils?"

"Yes; and more, too—for I received a before-hand tip from Monty to the effect that there was no real danger to be apprehended, while the Britisher fought in perfect good faith as to his own peril, no less than my own. In fact it was fair play and above-board with him this time."

"Oho!"

"Can you imagine, I say, his animus?"

"Why, I suppose it was that affair of the Red House, as a matter of course. It must have been rankling in him ever since like griping poison."

The other shook his head.

"Not that at all. Besides, if it was I that chiefly contrived his humiliation on that memorable occasion, it was you that knocked him down. Moreover, I saw by a glint of his gray eyes, when you and Weymouth first put in an appearance out yonder, that he would gladly have confronted you in my place, had circumstances permitted the substitution, which they didn't. Guess again."

"Well, I give it up. Or, perhaps he challenged you on general principles of hatred and resentment?"

"Neither that. He challenged me, as he frankly admitted, because he had newly discovered me to be his rival in love."

"Oho! both of you after the same girl, eh?"

"His rival in the love for your sister, Gladys Challoner," continued Wellborn, slowly.

Young Challoner's face, which was naturally somewhat pugnacious of expression, began to cloud.

"What!" he growled, a little huskily, and with a round oath; "is the titled hound daring to still entertain hopes in that direction?"

"Yes; and pushing them bravely, with your highly intellectual grandpapa's consent and best offices."

"Come, come, Mark, no reflections on the old governor! I know he is an eternally blasted old ass, but none must say so out of the family."

"All right, my boy."

"But look here, I don't understand. You, too, with regard to Glad?"

"Yes."

"But everything was all over between you long since?"

"The past is not always past mending. Since this forenoon, your sister is my betrothed wife."

The cloud on Ran's face deepened, and his hand that lay on the table slowly clinched, though with dissatisfaction more than positive anger.

Pampered in wealth and luxury from his childhood, and molded solely by the false, often heartless standards inseparable from an aristocracy whose basis is money, however education and refinement may gild or glose over its sordid source, it was perhaps not altogether the young man's fault that he was something of a snob and a good deal more of a fool in his views of life at large.

"Spare me your comments, old fellow, till you hear me out," Wellborn hastened to continue. "'Strike, but hear me!' as the old Roman prefaced his address to the refractory senate."

He then briefly sketched his morning's experience at the Challoner residence.

CHAPTER XXII.

PLAYING OFF DEAD.

RANDOLPH CHALLONER listened to these unexpected revelations with an indignation, amazement and secret mortification bordering upon stupefaction.

Of course, he could not but have been familiar with the original story of his mother's misfortune, and the disgrace that it was supposed to have brought upon his father's family.

But he was almost as sensitive upon the subject as his grandfather himself, and had fondly hoped, when he would permit himself to give the miserable business any thought at all, that it was long since buried out of public recollection, if not wholly and completely forgotten.

And here it was threatening to come up again, like a ghost to trouble joy, and to poison yet anew with its haggard presence the fair atmosphere of his prosperity, his pleasures, and perhaps cause undesirable comments or innuendoes upon his half-share of the vaunted Challoner name and blood among the select, exclusive and gilt-edged circle in which alone he cared to move, to shine and to have his daily sunshiny being.

He would have none of it—no, not in any shape! The revival of that miserable ghost, even if typifying his own mother's wrongs, and their cries to be righted, to stalk and groan once again through the privileged Challoner pleasure-house, must be crushed back and hindered at any cost.

Moreover, for the first time in his narrow and selfish life, he was at last beginning to fall in love on his own account. It was handsome and dashing Lady Bannington's blandishments that had at last made their impress and were rapidly bringing him to book. She was rich and still beautiful, if a dozen or more years his senior, and she loved him. Besides, he was not too conceited not to feel and know that she was his superior, mentally, morally and intrinsically, and might thence be the making of his future. In view of all this, and especially in view of her power and desire to please him, the bar sinister on the 'scutcheon of her own past—her being a divorced woman—was as nothing. She should be his, or rather, he should be hers. He would not have to wait for his senile but tenacious grandsire's death to be rich in his own right. She was a brilliant who had already made her mark, was likely to shine and conquer yet more signally; and might he not shine with her, if only by a borrowed luster, besides basking, care-free, in her large admiration, like a cat in the sunshine, and winning fresh social distinction and *ecclat* as her petted darling?

And now to have this haunting horror come up again with its pale face, its disheveled locks, its reproachful eyes! What would she think, or say—she, still a titled woman, and whose familiars had mostly been among the rich, the powerful, the great?

Not to be thought of—not for a single instant!

However, Randolph was nothing if not politic; and he was quick to see that he must put the best face upon Mark Wellborn's return into the mystic circle of the upper-crust with the least possible delay.

He accordingly, after a long and frowning silence, thrust his hand across the table with an appearance of impulsiveness.

"Take Glad to yourself, old fellow!" he cried. "Gad! what must be will be, I suppose. And she and you have had a growing fondness for one another this long time, as I happen to know."

"Thanks, Ran, I am sure!" But the heartiness of Mark's hand-clasp and words were little less artificial than those evoking them. "Now, you must go to Gladys at once, and assure her of my safety, lest a rumor to the contrary might reach her, besides arranging an appointment for our next meeting. Promise me this."

Ran nodded, and then momentarily fell into his troubled mood again, while the Society Detective eyed him with the furtive, secretly contemptuous criticalness that he had kept up since the conclusion of his revelations.

Indeed, none knew the narrow and selfish shallowness of his whilom college chum's character better than Mark Wellborn, and it was as in an open book that, with his keen analysis and bright judgment of human nature, he was enabled to read his thoughts and promptings just now.

"When and where shall you want to see Glad?" Randolph asked, after a pause.

Wellborn slightly knitted his brows.

"Let me see," he muttered, purposely, as if thinking, rather than speaking, aloud. "I shall wish to keep as close possible for perhaps several days. Couldn't you yourself bring her for a drive up the west side of Central Park to-morrow morning, at say ten or thereabouts? She could alight near the serpentine walk by the upper reservoir, where, of course, I would be on hand."

Ran drew a long face.

"Not very well," he hesitated. "You see, old fellow—"

"Ah, I had forgotten her ladyship," with a smile, to fill up the other's pause. "Nonsense! you needn't be ashamed of it, my boy. She is a magnificent woman, and would doubtless be the making of you."

"Julia is a stunner, out and out!" observed Gladys's brother, quickly recovering his composure, and not knowing what else to say for the moment.

"Of course she is—and to all appearances still in her first youth," exclaimed the detective, with genial mendacity. "Well, then, I suppose you can have no objection to having Gladys drive up to meet me alone?"

"Certainly not," with an air of relief. "Just the thing! I will notify her of everything without any delay, for it is nearly dusk, I perceive." And Ran forthwith rose, shook Mark's hand once more, and began putting on his overcoat.

He came to a sudden pause, however, before quitting the cabinet, his brow again darkening.

"But look here, Mark," he said, abruptly. "No revival of that old scandal with—with reference to my—to a certain person who shall remain nameless, you understand?"

"Oh, no!" the detective with difficulty eliminated from his tone the contemptuousness he was feeling; "save only in vindication, or in self-defense, as a matter of course."

"Save nothing!—matter of the devil!" cried the youth, angrily. "The thing sha'n't be revived again! Even my grandfather's sensitiveness, ridiculous as it generally is, was not at fault in taking that alarm!" with an oath.

Wellborn's steady gaze grew steel-like, and his face slowly hardened.

"Perhaps," he replied, coldly, "you would prefer the old story, such as Tressillian threatens to revive unless your sister can be forced to marry him, instead of the new and true one that thoroughly vindicates and rehabilitates a—certain person's wronged and cruelly vilified memory?" His lip curled.

"No, no; not that, of course. But—Well, by Heaven! the story sha'n't be revived in any shape."

"Indeed!"

"Now I'm in earnest here, Mark. I have suffered enough in the past on that sore spot, God knows!"

"You suffer! How may she have suffered, the wronged, the calumniated, whom you are such a mean-souled, cowardly snob as not to dare even to name?"

"What?"

"Go to the devil! Gladys and I shall manage the affair in our own way. And as for you"—with a disdainful short laugh—"well, it is doubtless a good thing for you that Julia Bannington cannot know of your caddishness! Yes, yes; I mean it all at last—it would be yourself, and not your mother's memory that you are so contemptibly ashamed of, that would chiefly feel her reprobation and her scorn. So don't try your great looks on me, if you are Gladys's brother, and a devilish unworthy one at that. It will do you no good."

The sluice-ways of patience had given way at last, and Mark Wellborn could not have abstained from that one passionate outbreak had his life depended on it.

Young Challoner's face had gradually blackened to something demoniac.

But there was just one amateur in the club whom he couldn't stand up before, in fisticuffs or anything else, and that was the young man before him at the present moment.

He plumped down in his seat again, looking furious but irresolute.

"Hard words those, Mark!" he managed to say, more or less huskily. "Hard words!"

Mark, whose resentment seldom lasted over the first heat, laughed apologetically.

"You shouldn't have deserved and thus stung them out of me, Ran," he replied, conciliatingly. "Of course I take them all back as meaning nothing—trusting to your common sense," he eyed him steadily, "for more considerateness on your own part." He held out his hand.

"Oh, all right!—of course, you couldn't mean all that insanity," and Ran shook hands again. "Trust me for giving my sister your message, anyway." He rose to go.

"But I want you to give it in the right way, Ran," were Wellborn's parting words, "or not at all."

"Trust me for that, old fellow. Bygones are bygones!"

"A true chip of the Challoner block!" soliloquized the detective when left alone. "I'd bet my head that Glad—God bless her!—takes after the maternal side of the house."

CHAPTER XXIII.

KEEPING DARK.

In order to reach the staircase, after quitting the cabinet, which he presently ventured to do, after taking the precaution of pulling up his overcoat collar high above his ears, burying his chin in his breast, and slouching his hat well down over his eyes and face, Wellborn had to cross the rear and less frequently used portion of the fencing-room.

As he did so, without being perceived, he remarked several of the club members in the apartment.

They were conversing in low tones with Montaldi about the spot on the sanded floor where the masked duel had taken place, and he could scarcely doubt, from the awed and serious aspect of the group, that they were already impressed with the fiction of his own death as the result.

"Good!" he chuckled, while slipping unobserved down the stairs. "An unfortunate accident" will be the general verdict, as a matter of course. Then Montaldi will doubtless manage the details and contradictions. My body will have been hurriedly conveyed away by Ran Challoner, with the avowed intention of keeping the tragedy from the public for a few days at least. Tressillian will be rather commiserated than blamed. Saving Ran himself, I don't believe there is a man in the club who knows my resident address, so that anxious inquiries will be stayed off in that quarter. Nothing should prevent me from keeping dark, and thus maintaining the deception, for a brief period, that I can see. And in the mean time everything ought to be done toward bringing his lordship's plans up with a round turn."

On his way home to dinner, however—for he

did not think it worth while to inconvenience himself by carrying his deception into his boarding-house, though the thought of Mrs. Le Duke's effusiveness caused him a fleeting sense of insecurity—another thing occurred to him.

"I must see Polly again to-night at all hazards," he thought. "It will not do to wait till to-morrow, for my appointment with Gladys in the morning might intervene."

Accordingly, after eating his dinner, with his accustomed reticence so far as his fellow-boarders were concerned, he went directly to his room for the purpose of making certain changes in his dress which, without constituting a formal disguise, would materially assist in somewhat masking or confusing his identity on the street or elsewhere, in case of an emergency.

While putting the finishing touches upon this task, there came the well-known timid tap on his door.

"Of course!" he growled; calling out, a little less bearishly. "Come in, come in! don't mind my being here in my own room, and still at my dressing-case. I'm no account."

Her pre-luncheon emotional mood was now as though it had not been, and she sidled into the room of her favorite boarder with all the coy and supple grace of which her amplitude of person was susceptible.

"Another ball, Mr. Mark?" she softly queried.

"But no, you haven't got on your charming dress-suit; though, bless us and save us! what have you been doing to yourself, Mr. Mark? I can't tell what exactly, and yet you hardly look the same gentleman."

"Humph!" finishing the set of his scarf, and without turning. "By the way, ma'm I'm not Mr. Mark, but Mr. Wellborn, which may somewhat account for your mystification."

"Oh!" clasping her hands with pathetic solicitude, and altogether heedless of the correction; "I see. It's a disguise! You must be on the brink of some perilous mission. Heavens!"

"Nothing of the sort, ma'm," dryly. "So, no need of hysterics, as you will perceive. What is it, if you please, Mrs. Le Duke?" putting on his hat. "I must be going."

"Mrs. Le Duke!" she repeated, reproachfully. "It used to be, or has been heretofore, 'the duchess,' or 'my dear duchess' Mr. Wellborn."

"Never, ma'm!—if you will permit me," blandly. "The 'duchess,' yes, but 'my dear duchess,' never! What have you to say to me, if you please?"

The impressionable creature sunk into Mark's only rocking-chair, which she filled to overflowing—a bewildering aggregation of coiffure, sleeves, bosom-lace and red wrapper draperies—her still pretty lip trembling, her black eyes threatening to overbrim.

"Oh, Mrs. Le Duke," continued the detective, beginning to lose patience altogether, "don't, please!"

"Don't what?" she murmured.

"I don't know—you know what I mean—don't do it, that's all!"

"I—I," was the wailed response, "didn't know I was a-doing nothing!" And then, with a flood of tears that was like the breaking away of a pond-weir, she lifted up her voice in lamentation and softly howled.

Wellborn stamped his foot.

"I'll be everlastingly banged," he exclaimed, opening the door, and changing the key from inside to out, "if you can't bawl, ma'm, with less effort than any lady I ever saw! You might strike a bargain with Barnum as a weeping freak. But I really must be going, and I hardly suppose you care to be locked in my room."

"He wouldn't have been so brutal!" murmured the widow, slowly pumping up her concluding sobs. "In fact, barring yourself, sir—though you don't deserve the compliment from me—he was as handsome and distinguished-looking a gent as any I ever met, and that sweet spoken that buttered parsnips wouldn't have melted in his mouth. And with such eyes and mustache!"

"Whom are you talking about?"

"The gent as was here inquiring about you, an hour or two before you came in."

"At so late an hour? His name?"

"Mr. Weymouth."

Mark with difficulty mastered a startled and mortified exclamation.

So, his residence was known then to both Tressillian and his follower—a contingency that he hadn't taken into account—and they were already on the alert as to the consequences of the masked duel, which they doubtless could not but deem as having cost him, the detective, his life.

"Mr. Weymouth, eh? Ah, indeed! and what did he have to say?"

"Not much of anything, sir; but he looked disturbed, and was very mysterious."

"Mysterious? But you say he inquired about me?"

"Just to ask if you were home yet, that was all. And when I remembered your injunctions to never know anything, and told him you were not home yet, and there was no knowing when you would be, he—well, Mr. Wellborn, there was where his mysteriousness came in."

"What did he say?"

"Not much. He merely looked awfully relieved of something, and said, 'Maybe won't come back at all.' I asked him what he meant by that. But he only shook his head and sighed again, without answering, though he seemed so affable and nice on other things—said I seemed to have a beautiful house, asked me the price of board, and even looked through my second floor back, saying he thought a lone widower like him might manage to be real comfortable there."

Mark was in turn relieved. It seemed to him that both Tressillian and Weymouth would probably now conclude that his, Mark's, cadaver had been secretly conveyed to some undertaker's, with the intention of keeping the affair quiet, and that they might now rest assured of no public sensation immediately arising over the affair.

Then another idea occurred to him, that evoked an inward smile. Small love as he might have for Weymouth, the latter was probably a man of some little remaining income, and might it not be a good thing for him, Mark, in the way of relieving himself of the redundant widow's rather inconvenient admiration, if this could be transferred to the Englishman, with perhaps a hymeneal tie in the prospective?

"No mystery at all, man!" said he, urbanely. "An odd genius, that Weymouth, though he won't be likely to call here on my account again."

"Bless you, Mr. Wellborn! and on whose account other than yours might the gentleman call again?"

"As if you couldn't guess?" smilingly. "But if you can't, why just consult your looking-glass for information, ma'm. And I will say this of Weymouth, he's not only vastly susceptible to beauty on a liberal scale, and of the black-eyed brunette variety, but I am quite sure he comes of a very excellent, if not titled, family in England."

"Oh! la now, Mr. Wellborn."

But it was evident that the widow was by no means displeased with the train of thought suggested, though she might have been even better satisfied with some manifestation of jealousy on her pet boarder's part.

"Fate's a queer thing, ma'm," oracularly observed the young man, "where two ripely-beating hearts are thus strangely brought together, and love is yet a queerer thing."

With this sage remark, and after enjoining her afresh as to her knowing nothing of his whereabouts, or even of his continued existence, in the event of fresh inquiries being made, he at last managed to effect his departure.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ONE OF POLLY BUXTON'S SECRETS.

THE Society Detective had no liking, under any circumstances, to call upon the "Countess von Gratzmarck" at her hotel quarters, but he knew of no other way of obtaining the desired interview, and accordingly proceeded thither, relying on the partial disguise he had made in his personal appearance to secure him from inconvenient observation on the part of outsiders.

It was a quiet and respectable, but not expensive, hotel, on the lower West Side.

On entering the office, he perceived the ridiculous figure of the countess's rat-catcher sire, soberly promenading the marble-tiled corridor, cigar in mouth, and seemingly with the weight of his last-acquired nobility weighing upon him rather seriously.

"Good-evening, Count Hohenstauffer," said Wellborn, making up to him at once. "May I ask if the countess is accessible?"

The little man stared at him blinkingly, without replying, and it was quite evident that he had no notion of who he was being addressed by.

So much the better.

Mark produced a blank card, scribbled some words thereon with a pencil, and handed it to the count.

"That for your illustrious niece, count," he directed. "I shall await her answer here."

"Sir!" snapped out the little, old pretender, with an absurd attempt at using the German accent, "ow is this ere? Hi am 'is Excellency the Count von 'Ohenstifflin!"

"Ah, of course, since you were Jemmy, the rat-catcher and flea-soap dispenser on White-chapel road. Do my errand without any delay, my little man, or you and I may quarrel."

The little man drew a long breath, scratched his head, and then, without another word, disappeared in the direction of the elevator.

He speedily returned, merely saying, "You're to go right hup, sir—it's rooms sixteen and heighteen." And a moment or two later Mark was admitted to the little parlor of the suite in question by the "countess" in person.

He noticed that Polly was greatly disturbed, and looked at him very hard, and with a peculiar expression.

"My God! I thought you were dead," she exclaimed, carefully closing the door behind him. "Mr. Weymouth assured me that you were, only a few hours ago."

"Sorry to dispute his word, Polly," replied the visitor, helping himself to a seat with his

habitual composure. "But here I am, as you perceive." And, then, in a few words, he put her in possession of the facts.

The adventuress seemed honestly glad to hear them, but was still apparently ill at ease.

"But, really," she said, in no little confusion, "I—I thought our appointment was for tomorrow, you know."

"So it was. Ah, you are expecting some one else? You really must excuse my inconsiderateness." And Wellborn, though disappointed, rose to go.

"No, wait!" she seized his arm, her excitement continuing. "You might meet him outside."

"Meet whom, my dear countess?"

"My expected visitor."

"Ah!" with a smile; "and he—"

"Is Lord Tressillian."

"God forbid!" exclaimed the detective, "for that would half-upset my new plans."

"I understand; therefore better wait."

"Lord Tressillian, eh?" Mark looked at the daring blonde in a way that somehow caused her to bite her lip and blush, little amenable to that sort of manifestation as she was. "But the deuce! the bare idea of your being through with him!"

"Mr. Wellborn," interposed Polly, decidedly, "it was true, what I told you. I have done with him so far as his backing protection, or whatever you've a mind to call it, is concerned."

"And yet you are expecting him now?"

"On business—strictly so!" And then, as he smiled incredulously, she added, with unusual earnestness, almost passionately: "You are making a grave mistake with me—touching upon my womanliness I mean."

"Am I? I really hope so," was the serious response.

"Yes, you are, and you may have proof of it some day, to my credit. Look you, Mr. Gentleman Detective Wellborn—and I have never found you anything but a gentleman—I rather desire to stand well in your good opinion."

Mark bowed, more and more puzzled by the woman's strange, almost pleading earnestness.

"Adventuress I am—light-fingered, to boot, perhaps," she went on, passionately. "It would be folly to deny it to you, and I sha'n't try. But, separated from a brute of a husband as I may be," there was a bright girlish color in her fair cheeks now, that made her even more than handsome—attractive, "my relations with Lord Tressillian, and such as he, have always been of a purely business character, you must understand."

"Business character?" repeated Wellborn, a little bewilderedly.

Instead of answering, a look of sudden panic came into her face, for a step that they both recognized was springily approaching along the hall without.

"It is Tressillian himself!" she exclaimed. "You wouldn't have him know you to be alive?"

"Not for the world, if I can help it!"

"Quick, then!" she had seized his arm.

"Where shall I put you? Here," opening a closet door, "this will do, and you can overhear us, if you like. In with you, sir!"

Before the detective could quite take in the full significance of the situation, he was secured in the closet, and he could hear her already admitting Tressillian into the room.

Luckily, the closet was a roomy one, with several trunks packed in against its back wall, and also fairly lighted from the adjoining apartment by a fan-light, which was open.

By noiselessly mounting one of the trunks, the detective could obtain a full view of the interior, while he could plainly hear everything that was said.

The first thing that he noticed, after thus posting himself, was Tressillian's manner toward the woman, and this was a sufficient surprise for him at the outset. For it was, as she had averred, of wholly a business character, though a little off-hand on occasion, and wholly devoid of the slightest trace of familiarity, or of even a once-existing familiarity, such as might have been naturally expected.

There were yet other revelations, of perhaps an even more surprising nature, in store for him.

On entering the room, Tressillian, who struck the watcher as looking unnaturally serious and preoccupied, made sure that the door was fastened behind him, after a mere nod and a "How are you by this time, Polly?" to the adventuress.

Then, while she remained silently standing and regarding him, with her hands on her hips, he seated himself gravely at her center-table, and produced a large pocketbook.

This, on being opened under the light proved to contain many tiny subdivisions, each with a little tongue-fastening of its own, and was altogether different from the sort that are intended for holding bank-notes.

"Two of the tiara lot are off color, Polly," observed his lordship in a very matter-of-fact tone, while inspecting the interior of this unique pocketbook. "Can't do much of anything with them."

"I don't see how it can be," replied Polly.

"There were sixteen in the tiara, and not one of 'em but pure, so far as I could judge."

Tressillian slightly shrugged his shoulders, without answering, and forthwith produced from one of the tiny pockets of the wallet a couple of good sized brilliants, which he laid upon the table, where they sparkled prettily in the gaslight.

"There you are," he said, shortly. "I can get a two third rate for them, if you are willing to let them go at that, but no more."

Polly took up the diamonds, and inspected them carefully.

"May be you think," observed his lordship, sneeringly, "that they are not of the lot I had of you?"

"Rest easy, my lord," coolly. "Yes, they're of the same lot; but the would-be expert who says they are off is a fool. I'll not trouble you any further with regard to these." And wrapping up the gems in some bits of tissue-paper, she put them in her pocket.

"As you choose."

Tressillian produced another, and more ordinary pocketbook, out of which he handed her a slip of writing.

"There is the memorandum," he said. "Is it correct?"

CHAPTER XXV.

POLLY AS A BUSINESS WOMAN.

THE adventuress inspected the memorandum with a practiced eye.

"It is right," she replied.

She then took a pencil from him, wrote something across the face of the slip, and laid it down before him, after which she held out her hand in the most natural and business-like way, indeed.

Tressillian counted her out some money, apparently a considerable sum, which Polly recounted, satisfiedly placed in her pocket, and the transaction was ended.

Tressillian seemed to be no less pleased than she, and lighted a cigar, after asking and receiving permission to do so.

"Any more of the beauties, Polly?" he drawled out, contemplating her comeliness abstractedly while slowly puffing away.

She had by this time seated herself by the fire, her low, white forehead puckered slightly for the moment, perhaps by business cares.

"I am afraid not, my lord," she replied, meditatively, lifting her blue eyes to his blue eyes. "You might find some of them 'off' again."

"No reflections, Polly!" he flushed a little. "It was other parties who found fault with those two, not I."

"Oh, no reflections intended on you, Lord Tressillian!" But she, in turn, drawled her words in a way that could hardly have been thought hearty or satisfactory.

"No more left, then, of the London 'takes'?"

She hesitated a moment, then said, "Wait!" and disappeared into the adjoining bedroom, whence she quickly reappeared, with a small morocco jewel-case in her hand.

Opening this, she took out a magnificent diamond bracelet, composed of a dozen or more fine, flashing stones, and laid it before him, while drawing her chair nearer to the table.

"Take a look at that," she observed, indifferently.

He had already taken up the trinket, his eyes inspecting the stones with eager interest.

"Fine ones, every one of 'em!" he remarked. "I think I could find a young gentleman customer for each."

"You're quite sure none of 'em is off?"

"Drop that, if you please, young woman!" a little irritably. "No; not one but seems pure and of first water. But I am only an amateur sharp, as you know."

"I know that you say so."

"Drop it, I tell you!" harshly. "Is it a go, or isn't it?"

"Oh, yes, I suppose so."

He summarily produced a small jeweler's tweezers or pliers, rapidly working around the wristlet with a series of sharp, clicking sounds, and the diamonds were out of their setting.

"Nine?" He looked up inquiringly, at which she nodded.

He then carefully secured the brilliants in one of the sub-pockets of his strange wallet, closed the latter and put it out of sight, together with the one out of which he had counted the money.

As before, there was no business ceremony—no writing, no signatures, no exchange of acknowledgments; and yet the transaction had a thorough-paced business air and flavor.

Polly coolly possessed herself of the gemless gold setting, while Tressillian rose and took up his hat.

His breezy, well-fed, devil-may-care aspect and suggestiveness were restored, and one could not but find something attractive in his careless ease and swing, even in the insolence and lawlessness of their independence.

"Anything else I can do for you, Polly?" She shook her head slowly. "By the way, as to that varieties engagement—"

"Drop it!" she interrupted, with an imitation of his own abruptness in the use of the same words, "I'm doing for myself now in that line, thanks."

He looked surprised, and not a little nettled.

"Oho!" he sneered. "Some other fellow's influence, I suppose?"

"Not at all. It will be on my own merits and my own shape. And then there is to be an end of that!" with a gesture significant of diamond transactions in the abstract.

He shrugged his shoulders, and laughed good-naturedly.

"Humph!" he said, with a purely artistic eye for her fine figure; nothing wrong about the shape, any way. Well, if there is nothing more I can do for you, my dear, I'll skip along."

"Wait, if you please, Lord Tressillian. Yes, there is one thing more."

"Glad to hear it."

"I want you to keep Bill Buxton away from me!" exclaimed the adventuress, with some temper. "If you don't, I'll shoot him sooner or later! so you have fair warning."

"Good Lord! don't think of doing that, Polly!" cried Tressillian, a look of alarm that was somewhat comical coming into his face. "At least, not till I've won my bets on him, for heaven's sake!"

"I care nothing for your bets. You have my warning with regard to the brute."

"Well, well, I'll see what can be done—I'll really see what can be done!"

"I don't care for your *seeing* about it—I want to see it done! At all events, if he undertakes to annoy me again, it will be at his peril."

"All right! all right!" He was still pausing, hat on, overcoat buttoned up. "And by the way, Polly, if you should have anything else for me, you might as well come around to my rooms with it. It may take me a week or more to place these stones to the best advantage, and I have other and pressing affairs."

"Same rooms at the Brunswick?"

"Yes."

"Same hours for finding you in them, without inquiry at the office?"

"Yes, yes; but you'll not try to come in petticoats again? It won't do you know."

"All right. But suppose I should happen to come when you are out."

"No need of it, since you know my hours."

"But it might chance that way. You are not the only one with other and pressing affairs."

"Well, well, you could shove a note for me under the door."

"Perhaps for a chambermaid to pick up and read before your return!"

"True, true! Wait, then; here is my extra key for you."

He handed it over to her, and then took his departure.

"Well?"

This was all that Polly said, as she opened the closet door, and the detective stepped into view.

He smiled, nodded, and seated himself in the chair that Lord Tressillian had occupied, where, however, he scratched his head, perhaps a little bewilderedly.

"Do you have a better opinion of me now?" she demanded of him, somewhat triumphantly.

"Better opinion?"

"Yes; I hope you can't still think me capable of—of," she colored, "anything disreputable, you know?"

"Oho!" he began to understand. "Polly, you are a good woman—that is, in that way," and he shook her hand warmly. "You see, I was naturally thinking of something else—entirely apart from your womanly reputation."

"Aha!" with her melodious English laugh; the diamonds?"

"That, in part."

"Make yourself easy, my friend; there was not one of those you saw that was acquired by my industry in this country."

"Humph! but even that isn't quite it. The idea of Lord Tressillian acting for you in this capacity."

"That is nothing," observed Polly, with a contemptuous movement of her pretty shoulders.

"What won't a bankrupt sporting lord do for money? One of that breed doesn't differ from another. It's common enough in London, if not here. True, the titled worthy mostly wants the woman, together with the diamonds. But Tressy only made one extraneous offer, as you might say, and I fancy he remembers to this day the box on the ear that sent him reeling for his pains." She laughed again. "Bully Bill hadn't quite drubbed out of me all my original liking for him at that time, and there was both pith and temper in this right arm of mine, I can tell you, Mr. Wellborn. And I am so glad you saw and overheard all this." She seemed honestly pleased and elated.

"But why, especially, Polly?"

"Why? Because now you will have a better opinion of me."

"I certainly do, Polly—in the particular sense you mean. But why should you care especially for my good opinion just in that sense, when you must know that it is in none other that I can approve of you at all?"

"I don't know exactly. I say, Mr. Wellborn, shall I treat you to some wine? It would give me real pleasure."

"Thanks, no, Polly. I would be better contented just to have you answer my question."

"Well, then, but wait!" she looked at him

laughingly, her China-blue eyes sparkling, the color coming and going under her fair skin, her white, even teeth flashing at the generous parting of her large, handsome mouth; "didn't I tell you I might one day fall in love with you, Mr. Wellborn?"

"Nonsense!"

"Well, then," more seriously, "all this joking apart, my friend, I somehow feel desirous of having the good opinion of an American gentleman, like you. It's so different in England, you know."

"In what way, Polly?"

"Men don't treat women as well or as kindly there as they do in this country. Women are treated there, even when petted and caressed, more like beautiful animals. I think you must know what I mean, without my trying to express myself more closely."

"Yes, I think I do, Polly." He shook her hand again, and rose. "Now I must be going. That colloquy of yours with Tressillian was equivalent to the longest sort of a chat between us two. And how cleverly you managed with his room-key!"

"Didn't I?"

"When shall you be able to search for the supposed writing?"

"Doubtless to-morrow, or next day. At all events, I'll expect you to-morrow evening at about this time."

CHAPTER XXVI.

BY THE WEST DRIVE.

REASONABLY sure that Randolph Challoner would not neglect the message for Gladys, and that she would make her appearance in Central Park, agreeably to the appointment, Mark Wellborn was seasonably on hand in the vicinity of the West Drive, near the spot indicated, on the following morning.

He had posted himself near a little rustic summer-house, surmounting an eminence, just back of the roadway, whence he could command the sweep of the latter for a considerable distance over the tree-tops in either direction.

It was a mild, genial day in latter February, with suggestions of spring already in the air, though the bare trees and shrubs as yet showed no budding expression of the life of sap that was beginning to stir and thrill along their woody veins.

The spot was one that had been favorably familiar to both Gladys and Mark in the old *dolce far niente*, lotus-eating days, when life, for the youth no less than the maiden, was still but a golden play-day, though with nothing but vague hintings of the passion that was now come, along with trouble and uncertainty, to set its indelible though roseate seal upon their fortunes and their lives.

It was many and many a side by side canter on horseback, or swift howling T-cart junketing, along the driveway yonder, or through the depressed, serpentine bridle-road just beyond, with buoyant spirits and happy hearts.

Mark remembered that they had often noted this very summer-house, by which he was now watching with such different thoughts and transformed emotions, thinking or saying how pleasant and airy it must be up there above the dust and heat of summer afternoons.

Behind him, at the distance of a mile or less, the great masonry-imprisoned reservoir-lake opened the bosom of its shining waters, like a little artificial sea, with hosts of snowy sea-gulls collecting upon its half-submerged division line or swooping over the bright wavelets.

Before and around, stretched the varied and undulating scenery that has contributed to making Central Park, with its drives, its walks, its rambles and its decorations, one of the finest, if not one of the most spacious, pleasure-grounds in the world.

But, in spite of the favorable weather, comparatively few equipages were to be seen on the west side drive, and as the appointed hour approached, Wellborn frequently cast his glance down along the broad, smooth concourse with out perceiving so much as a single vehicle in sight.

"What if Ran failed to deliver my message?" he at last muttered, impatiently. "He was artificial enough in his congratulations, and I could read his mean-spirited and selfish alarm over the possible revival of his mother's unhappy story underneath it all. But no; cad that he is, he would hardly venture upon a deliberate act of bad-faith with me just at this critical time, I fancy. Ha!"

He suddenly shifted his position, looking eagerly away.

A brilliant open equipage, with a gentleman and lady luxuriously reclining in its lap, the coachman's bright livery and the horses' sleek coats flashing gayly in the sun, had just appeared around the curve at the head of the drive, and was coming down the gradual declivity at a rattling, stylish pace.

"Lady Bannington's turnout!" was the detective's next comment. "Yes; and Ran himself beside her ladyship, like a pet poodle, among the cushions. Strange that he should be on hand at this particular hour, above all others!—but like enough a mere coincidence—Hallo! the Chal-

loner turnout just behind, and—what! a runaway, too, by Jupiter!"

It was true.

He sprang into the adjacent path, and was the next instant speeding down and away in the direction of the drive like the wind.

But, if he had stayed his rush by a moment or two, he would also have perceived two horsemen—one a mounted policeman, the other a fine-looking florid man, and both superb riders—also wheeling into view and in break-neck pursuit of the runaway.

But Mark had caught a glimpse of a pale, terrified face—Gladys's face—at the coach window, and that was sufficient.

Her ladyship's victoria had drawn to one side to afford a clear coast for the runaway, and, as the detective pantingly covered the last few rods of his path, which were masked by bushes and trees, he heard the mad thundering of the oncoming hoofs.

Then there was a scream, an encouraging shout, and a sort of scuffling crash, mingled with a confused trampling sound, as indicating that the runaways were being mastered, and he burst out of the thicket within a few yards of the spot—only to instantly draw back again out of view, and with a momentary embarrassment and irresolution to which he was mostly a stranger.

The frightened steeds had been overtaken and stopped by the two horsemen, one of whom, Lord Tressillian, who had apparently been chiefly instrumental in the rescue, was already assisting Gladys, still panic-stricken, but unhurt, out of the vehicle; while the coachman, who had been thrown from his seat, was just running up, covered with dust and with his glazed hat battered out of recognition, from where he had fallen.

Lady Bannington's coach was also coming up on the scene, with such alarm and solicitude as might be expected of its occupants.

The detective fairly ground his teeth in his mortification and rage.

His dilemma was certainly a trying one.

To step into view was to apprise Tressillian of his being still alive, and thus surrender an immense advantage in the complicated counterplot that was so well under way; while to remain in his concealment was to enable the Englishman to make the most of the fairly heroic rescue that had just been effected, and to pose with obvious interest for himself in the eyes of the young lady, still fresh from her imminent peril, and presumably alive to a common sentiment of thankfulness and gratitude.

However, fortunately for the success of his schemes, this trying ordeal on the part of Wellborn was but of brief endurance.

Gladys seemed to be mistress of the situation and of herself the moment her feet had touched *terra firma*.

"Thank you a thousand times, my lord!" Mark heard her say, in a clear, collected voice, while firmly but courteously declining any further assistance from the Englishman's proffered arm. "You have placed me under a great obligation—one that may possibly atone for the past, but no more," in a lower voice, accompanied by a coldly significant glance. "But I am quite myself now, and shall need no further attention. Thanks to you also, sir!" turning to the policeman, who had not dismounted, and now touched his helmet, with a low bow. "Thomas, the coachman, will give you my address, when I shall be able to thank you more substantially and at my leisure."

Tressillian had drawn gravely back, and was standing calmly with his bridle-rein over his arm, while the coachman, who had not been seriously bruised, was rapidly succeeding in calming the still nervous runaways.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE INTERVIEW AT LAST.

"BETTER come in with us here, Gladys," called out Lady Bannington from her victoria, now drawn up abreast. "After your shaking up, a quieter drive with us will rest you nicely."

Randolph reinforced this suggestion, but not very pronouncedly, knowing as he did that Mark could not be far away, and would be little thankful for an insistence that would serve to cheat him altogether out of his already interrupted appointment.

"No, thank you, Lady Bannington," replied Gladys, smiling. "You will observe that I am perfectly composed by now; and I will stroll up in the direction of the reservoir while Thomas is quieting the animals with easy driving herabouts. This is an old favorite of mine, this spot," taking in her surroundings with a pleased air as she stepped to the roadside, "and I shall enjoy the loneliness of the stroll."

The last words were accompanied by another glance toward Lord Tressillian, who was sensible enough to accept the hint, notwithstanding that he had been on the point of eagerly offering himself as her escort.

He accordingly lifted his hat, remounted his horse, and rode off in the policeman's company without a word, though doubtless well enough pleased with his share in the adventure.

Then Mrs. Bannington and her cavalier drove

on, after a few more exchanges with Gladys as to the cause of the runaway, the latter gave a few parting instructions to her coachman, who was once more on the box, with the culprits well in hand, and the sensation was at an end.

The end of the path thrust itself invitingly out from the thicket.

Gladys entered it very quickly, and was the next moment in her lover's arms.

"Ah, it must, indeed, have been a trial for you, my darling!" she exclaimed, a few minutes later, when he had explained the situation.

"Say nothing of that now, dearest!" he replied. "I should have been content with your fortunate escape from injury, out yonder in the drive, even if it was that scoundrel's luck to save you."

"Of course, that couldn't be helped, and I would gladly enough to have been indebted solely to the policeman, as you may well believe. However, perhaps you overheard what I said to his lordship?"

"Ah! about your accepting the service as his atonement for the past?"

"That, and no more! It should have given him something to think about, I fancy."

"Not to be hoped! However you did well to call it quits with him, and no more. He cannot fail to understand, at all events. A dangerous man, Glad, and a far worse one than I had any suspicion of, if not an actual criminal!"

"What! you have some new revelation as to Tressillian's villainy?"

They had by this time reached the little summer-house on the hill, in which they seated themselves, as affording both privacy and a fair security against possible interruption.

"Yes."

"Tell me everything, Mark! But in the first place, you must give me the particulars of the strange and dreadful duel."

"But your brother must have already done that much."

"Not very satisfactorily. You see, your subsequent revelations of our affair and the attendant situation were but little to his taste."

"Humph! I should say not. However, of that hereafter."

And Wellborn accordingly related the details of the duel, adding, cheerfully:

"So you see, my dear, that Tressillian has come out of the affair second best in more ways than he can have any idea of."

"You mean, in his continued supposition that he really succeeded in killing you?"

"To be sure! Of course, he will consider that he has the field entirely to himself now, and will be all the more off his guard. Though I must make the most of my advantage, as he cannot be reasonably kept in such an error for more than a couple of days at the furthest."

"I understand. But the cold-blooded murderousness of his intention throughout the affair!"

She shuddered, and, seizing her lover's hand, pressed it hard, as if to reassure herself that he was still safe and living at her side.

"Well, there was something manly and frank in his hatred on that one occasion, at least," observed Mark, if a little reluctantly. "I shall always be willing to remember that much to his credit, when the big accounting comes between us."

"You spoke of something else—something newly discovered?"

"Ah, I should say so!" Wellborn's voice was tinged with sudden contempt. "Could you imagine a British nobleman, Glad—though even a ruined profligate and bankrupt gambler, such as this man Tressillian—as descending to assist a professional thief in the disposition of stolen property—as a systematized business, too, mind you?"

"Heavens, no, Mark!" she looked at him with a startled expression. "You surely don't mean to say that Lord Tressillian—"

"Just that, Glad! Listen to me, and you shall have the entire story."

He forthwith gave her a complete account of his experience with the adventuress, Polly Buxton, of the preceding evening.

But before he had finished, Gladys found herself more interested in the woman herself than in the exposure of Tressillian's new crookedness.

"It is something awful, this!" she said, slowly. "Indeed, I wonder that Tressillian hasn't been in trouble with the authorities before this, though I suppose he is intelligent and cunning enough to cover his tracks."

"Trust him for that. Though, of course, I could State-prison him from what I have already discovered, if I chose to; which, however, would be hardly fair to Polly under the circumstances. Besides, the ownership of the stolen loose gems, together with the fact of their having been stolen at all, would be a difficult thing to prove, without the woman's making a clean breast of it, which, of course, she would never do. However, it is still an arrow in my quiver as against Tressillian, in case of need."

"Yes, Mark," assented Gladys, who had suddenly grown unusually serious, "that is all very well. But, dearest—I don't like the thought of your visiting that woman's apartments."

"You can't dislike the notion more than I do,

Glad," reassuringly. "And I doubt if I shall be under the necessity of seeing her more than once or twice again. She is not more than half-bad either—possesses some downright generous qualities, in fact."

"And," solemnly, "she is a very handsome woman!"

Mark laughed, instantly checked himself on perceiving how seriously Gladys was taking it. Besides, there was more than a passing jealousy in the subject for her, which he had momentarily lost sight of.

"Polly Buxton is all of that," he assented, "though fully ten years my senior. 'However, my darling,' and he began to fondle her pretty, gloved hand, 'as I said before, I shall soon be done with the necessity of holding any further communication with the woman whatever, even if there were the slightest danger of my ever giving a thought for any other woman in the world than your own darling, beautiful self.'"

But Gladys had started at the mere mention of the adventuress's married name in full.

"Oh, it isn't that, Mark—at least, not that alone!" she faltered, coloring pitifully. "But this rough man, the husband from whom she is separated, is—is he not—" She could go no further.

"Ah, I had forgotten! My poor dear, how I commiserate you! And yet it was not your angel mother's fault—even Tressillian called her that, and with the profoundest respect, an angel, when recounting her sad history to your grandfather—to have sprung, a rare lily, from such strange stock."

But Gladys could not abstain from bursting into tears, though it was on her lover's shoulder that she sobbed out her humiliation and grief.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AN UNEXPECTED APPARITION.

THERE was one aspect of Gladys Challoner's sense of humiliation on this unhappy subject of her mother's unfortunate extraction, however, which struck her lover as forcibly contrasting her brother's feelings in the same matter, and he did not hesitate to say so.

"Have your cry out, dearest," he murmured, consolingly. "We are quite shut away from observation up here, and it may do you good. Thank God, you can indulge your unhappiness in a different spirit from what Ran exhibits, at all events."

She looked up inquiringly, with a brave effort at composure.

"Ran?" she queried.

"Yes." And he told her bluntly of her brother's snobbish manifestation on the preceding evening.

Nothing could have better aroused the girl's self-respect and noble spirit than this.

"I am ashamed of him!" she exclaimed. "He to wish to hush up the matter, with our poor mother's womanly reputation sealed down and blackened by that hideous, calumniating lie! Oh, if she were but alive and here!" stretching forth her hands, with a world of pathetic tenderness in her trembling voice and melting manner, "that I might take her to my bosom, and soothe her into forgetfulness of that past, that has so maligned and crushed her, with the magic of my love and tenderness! Grandpapa might turn me a pauper from his doors, if only this were vouchsafed me!"

And then the tears that followed were of a more subdued and less bitter flowing.

Wellborn regarded her wistfully for a moment, and then caught her to his breast.

"Noble girl!" he exclaimed. "But, look you, Gladys! this privilege may yet be in store for your future, as my darling wife, come what will of your foolish old grandfather's wealth, and when we have righted your mother's cruel wrongs, so far as in us lies. For you cannot know that she is dead. Indeed, I have a feeling that she may yet be in the land of the living."

But Gladys mournfully shook her head.

"It can hardly be," she murmured.

"But you are not sure of that?"

"Reasonably so. You have heard that my poor mother, on her return to this country a hopeless outcast, as you might say," the young girl's voice quivered, but she bravely held on—"her husband dead, her children with their grandfather—you doubtless know, I say, that she found an asylum with a distant and kindly relative of my father's, who believed in her story of the truth and sympathized with her for the wrongs you have suffered?"

"Yes," replied Mark, "I know that much, from her true story as vouched for to Mr. Challoner by Lord Tressillian, but nothing of the particulars."

"I am a little better informed now, on my part, though only since last night."

"Since last night?"

"Yes; and I will tell you what I know, Mark."

"Do, do, my darling!"

"My mother died soon after being received in that last asylum, which was in a remote New England town."

"What! you were informed to this effect only last night?"

"Yes; or virtually to this effect, though the

information was grudgingly, perhaps hysterically, afforded me rather by implication than with any detail, other than that the poor sufferer passed her last days in comfort and comparative peace of mind."

"This is very astonishing! From whom did you receive this information, Gladys?"

"From the gentle woman herself—God bless her!—who had afforded that asylum, and was with my poor mother to the last."

"And she—"

"Is Aunt Betsey Warder, grandpapa's present housekeeper."

"The deuce!" was all Wellborn could say at the moment, while a hundred thoughts began to form and connect themselves indistinctly in his mind.

"To think," continued the young girl, "of her having been with us all these years, and of our having called her 'aunt' through mere home-familiarity almost from the start, and she being a real relative without our suspecting it!"

"Strange, indeed! And Mr. Challoner has not suspected it either?"

"Dear me! no. And the good woman is fearful lest it should come to his knowledge now, as you may imagine."

"What induced her to thus become an inmate in your home, *incognita*, as you might say?"

"The hope of an opportunity for righting mamma's memory at some time or another, so she says. She must soon have relinquished this hope, however, on becoming more thoroughly acquainted with grandpapa's prejudices. Besides, she had lost her little property soon after mamma's death, which may have also assisted her to the step."

"I don't see how she came to make a *confidante* of even you, after all these years of secrecy."

"I can't tell you exactly how it came about. I happened to surprise her in tears—the idea of Mrs. Warden in tears!—a sufficiently startling novelty in itself. Then she informed me that she had recently undergone some sort of nervous shock, she said, which might have tended to weaken her determination to continued reticence. At all events, she suddenly revealed herself to me, though but vaguely, as I have said."

"Ah, perhaps I can throw some light upon the nervous shock the good woman alludes to! Her painful agitation is explainable now."

"You, Mark?"

"Yes." And he forthwith related the little part that the woman had played in the close of his eavesdropping watch behind the library portiere.

"Why did you not tell me this at the time, Mark?" Gladys asked. "You were less reticent with regard to Pinchet, the valet."

"True; but somehow the poor woman's agitation, and the unselfishness of it, caused me to remain silent, though of course I meant to tell you sooner or later. She must be a good soul."

"Good! That is no name for it! Poor mamma's last and only friend! I only pray that I may one day be able to reward her as she deserves."

Here there ensued a short silence, which was finally broken by Wellborn saying, suddenly:

"I wonder what could have become of the polished scoundrel who was the cause of your mother's misfortunes, Gladys—the Lieutenant or Captain Peyton, as he appears so blackly in the story of her wrongs."

The young girl started.

"Heaven knows!" she replied, after a troubled pause; "as perhaps Heaven may have long since avenged her wrongs upon his head. But how did this occur to you, Mark?"

"By a sort of coincidence—the thought of Tressillian's follower and compatriot, Weymouth, I suppose. Weymouth, or H. Peyton-Weymouth, as he is more formally addressed."

"Ah, I understand. He may be some connection, indeed."

"That was what occurred to me, as a matter of course." And then Wellborn burst into a short laugh, that was seemingly irrelevant enough.

Gladys looked at him inquiringly, and in no little surprise.

"I don't see that it is a laughing matter," she said, gravely.

"A feature of the matter that occurs to me is, though, as I think you will agree with me." Still laughing, he rose to stretch himself, and in doing so again glanced out and away over the West Drive, which was now gay with various equipages traversing it. "By the way, I have already told you something of my extraordinary landlady, and her eccentric admiration for your humble servant."

Gladys laughed in her turn.

"Ah, the duchess, as you call her?"

"Sometimes. Well, something odd has occurred, and I have a sort of plan that may eventually rid me of the good but very susceptible woman's rather inconvenient attentions. You see—"

He suddenly broke off, while shading his eyes for a better outlook away, with the exclamation: "Bless me! can it be possible? Yes, as I live!"

"What can you be raving about, Mark?" cried Gladys, also rising, and joining him in his observation.

He burst into another laugh, which, however, was not unrelievedly mirthful just now.

"Talk of coincidences," he guffawed, "but this unexpected apparition must take the cake! The duchess herself, and he with her, or I'm a Pagan!"

"Mark, don't dare to be so selfish and provoking!" she stamped her foot. "Where? how? what?"

"Forgive me, dearest! But see for yourself—your eyes ought to be better than mine. Look!" he pointed with his hand. "The shabby-looking buggy, with the gray horse—there, just passing the base of the bronze falconer, behind that dashing team!"

"Ah, I see! And that huge brunette woman in it, who seems to overflow the entire rig with her amplitude of person?"

"The duchess—Mrs. Le Duke!"

"And her companion, the spare gentleman driving, who is all but hidden away by her skirts and cloak?"

"Tressillian's follower, H. Peyton-Weymouth!"

"You can't mean it? But yes, I seem to recognize him now."

Then they both laughed, and a moment later the pair were out of sight, not to reappear.

But Mark speedily grew considerably less jocose.

"The man is pushing his case with the widow unreasonably soon," he said. "I must be careful if I am to preserve my present advantage of non-existence for any length of time."

CHAPTER XXIX.

SUSPENSE.

WELLBORN then relieved Gladys's impatience by telling her of Weymouth's visit of inquiry at his residence on the preceding afternoon, together with the impression that he had apparently made upon Mrs. Le Duke.

"Had he never met her before?" asked Gladys, elevating her brows.

"Never."

"And now, the very next day, he is taking her out to drive! Dear me! your boarding-mistress must be a very peculiar sort of a woman, Mark, or Mr. Weymouth must be both a peculiarly impressive and attractive gentleman, I don't know which."

"It's the duchess," said Mark. "Weymouth is only making sure as to the good faith of my demise, I fancy, though he may well enough have been really attracted by the widow, who is still a handsome woman, not over forty-five perhaps, without children or other incumbrances, and possessing a fairly profitable property in her business. A case of love at sight, doubtless—ha, ha! But I don't exactly like it."

"She knows of your desire to seem to be dead to Tressillian and this man?"

"Yes; or that she is to know nothing whatever about me, which would answer equally well."

"And she will keep your secret?"

"If the rascal doesn't make love to her too fast, yes, undoubtedly. However," his face clearing, "I'll take my chances with her not giving me away for a while, at all events, though I can't afford to delay."

"But I can't understand it," said the young woman, thoughtfully. "If these men are already of the opinion that you were slain in the duel, why should they deem it advisable to inquire any further at all into the matter?"

"I think I can understand something of their solicitude in that regard," replied the detective. "You see there must, nevertheless, be a mystery in their minds in connection with my supposed death."

"A mystery!"

"Of course. Though the event only happened yesterday afternoon, there has been no corpse seen, and the 'tragedy' is still a mere matter of club talk. Montaldi could have said that Ran saw to the secret conveyance of the body to a conveniently discreet undertaker's, and all that sort of thing. But a man isn't to be killed in these days, even by accident in a fencing bout—as the story would be circulated—without the particulars sooner or later seeing the light. And of course I'll have to have a funeral, you know. There can't very well be a dead man without a funeral, of course."

"I understand your anxiety now."

"Well, let it go. But, unless Polly makes a success of her promised co-operation before this time to-morrow, I shall have to relinquish all hope of any advantage from a continuance of the hoax."

"Let us then hope for the best, as you say, dearest. There is now cause for anxiety on my account, too."

"So!"

"Yes; you see, we have had so many other things to talk about that I haven't had a chance to speak of it."

"Is Tressillian pressing the old gentleman hard, already?"

"Yes; I suppose he feels the necessity of pushing matters no less than you do, on your part. He had a long interview with grandpapa last night, and when he called on me this morning, he seemed to be full of secret confidence

in himself, though outwardly subdued and deprecatory enough."

"What! Tressillian called on you this morning?"

"Yes, shortly before I set out for my drive up here. I think he must have ridden after the coach, which would explain his timeliness at the ensuing 'rescue,' for he was equipped for the road when he called."

"I shouldn't have thought you would have received him."

Gladys placed her hand on her lover's arm, and looked into his eyes appealingly.

"Mark, I had to!" she replied, slowly.

"What! on compulsion?"

"Virtually that. There was a scene at breakfast, in which grandpapa acted like a senile madman. He not only commanded me to receive Lord Tressillian's attentions with complacency, threatening to turn me out, homeless and penniless, in case of obduracy, but he abused you, no less than my mother's memory, shamefully."

"Ha! then Tressillian cannot yet have transmitted to him the supposition of my being finally disposed of?"

"Evidently not. Oh, it was dreadful! I never saw grandpapa quite so insane on the subject of his ridiculous family pride. Even my brother fell to taking my part at the last, and right manfully, too."

"Ha! did he so? Good for Ran! he's the right stuff at bottom after all. How did he act?"

"Indignantly enough! He even got up from the table, saying that if I was to be cast off, it should only be in his company. Neither did he hesitate to stand up for you as against Tressillian."

"Good, good! And I'd lay a wager that I could name the cause of Ran's change of base to the right side."

"To what do you attribute it?"

"To Lady Bannington. Trust me that he has made a general revelation to her, and received a thorough hauling over the coals for his contemplated pusillanimity. Bless her ladyship's heart! She is a true woman, with nothing but sound democratic sense in her little head. Catch her up holding him in his proposed indifference to his mother's memory and wrongs!"

"Perhaps you are right. Grandpapa ended with a passionate outburst that I feared would cost him his life. But her allied, and at last subsided into a wailing querulousness that was truly pitiable. Mark, forgive me, but I half-promised to treat Tressillian decently for the time being, in order to cheer the poor old man up a bit!" Gladys shed some tears at this point. "Besides, I wasn't prepared, any more than Ran was, to be cast out at a moment's notice."

"Nothing to forgive, you poor dear! What else could you do? But you say Tressillian behaved pretty decently when he did call?"

"He was subdued and gentlemanly; I will say that for him."

"Any hint from him as to my being out of the way?"

"Not a word, nor even in the way of pressing his attentions upon me, for that matter. A mere formal call on the face, with a suggestion of his being alert, and contented to bide his time. That is the best description I can give of his visit, and how it impressed me. I was coldly, though not offensively polite, and that was all."

"Humph! Well, we must bide our time, though in neither a contented or leisurely spirit. I see what he is meditating, I think."

"To spring the news of my death upon both yourself and your grandfather, as one of his master-cards!"

"You think so?"

"I feel all but sure of it. You see, he is merely waiting for the affair to be made public, and is willing enough to assist in hastening its publicity. That explains Weymouth's secret activity in the matter. Of course, any published account (supposing that I am still thought dead) would be based on the ground that the entire affair was an important accident. Tressillian would like enough not only to be absolved from blame by public opinion, but might even attract no little sympathy. As for your own sentiment of repulsion for him as the unintentional author of my effacement, he would willingly risk that, merely to have you assured of my death, trusting in time for healing the wound and bettering his own chances."

"What shall you do?"

"Merely try to keep the mystery intact till to-morrow, at least, and in the mean time trust in the Countess Von Gratzmarck redeeming her promise before then—say some time to-day."

"The Countess Von what? Who is she?"

"Polly Buxton, the diamond expert," with a smile.

"Oh, I had forgotten. Well, in case she is successful?"

"We must then give your mother's true story to the newspapers for immediate publication. I can manage that."

"It will be an open rupture with grandpapa, even if it disposes of Tressillian's claims!"

"Let it come! You will doubtless be disinherited, but—"

"But I shall still have you!" and Gladys

threw herself in her lover's arms. "Yes, Mark, let it come, as you say! I shall still have your love, and my mother's memory will have been righted."

Needless to speak of the eagerness with which the detective responded to the embrace, necessarily a fleeting one, that followed.

"Gladys, you are a noble girl!" he exclaimed, as she withdrew, blushing and half-repentant, from his caress. "A king should be proud of such a love as yours, so the felicity of a poor devil of a Society Detective like myself can be better imagined than described."

"Don't say that, Mark!" she cried. "I won't have you depreciate yourself in that way. Your vocation is a legitimate and respectable one, you work for your subsistence—one of some use in the world, instead of a gilded do-nothing, and I am proud of you for it!"

"But the magic circle—your heretofore exclusiveness—the mystical Four Hundred?"

"That for the Four Hundred!" with a disdainful gesture. "Better far to be of the working and useful fifty odd millions, than of all the pampered, self-celebrating petty handfuls that ever vaunted their roseate rules and limitations to the just derision of human intelligence, worth and noble feeling at large!"

Mark was delighted.

"Glad, you are such a social heretic as helps the great world to spin along in the grooves of enlightenment and progression forever!" he exclaimed. "There's a nurse-maid wheeling her perambulator up our path yonder, or I should snatch you again to my heart as never yet before! But look here, it may be that we are borrowing trouble, after all."

"In what way, Mark?"

"Why, let the blow, as I hope to have it in readiness, once fall, and the old gentleman may accept the inevitable better than we so gloomily anticipate."

"I hope so, but am afraid not."

"Well, he would be out of Tressillian's power at one fell stroke, at all events, which is something."

"Ye-es, something."

"But we must take the risk."

"Certainly."

"Do you think Tressillian will be with your grandfather again this evening?"

"I think it is probable."

"Ah, it will doubtless depend on whether he shall be ready to avow the fact of my supposed elimination, I presume."

"That is very likely."

"Well, in case he should come, pray try to have Ran remain at home with you in readiness for what may occur."

"I shall do so."

"The interviews between them are still held in the library?"

"Yes."

"Ah, that blessed *portiere*! It may stand us in good stead yet again, for aught we know. But yonder is your coachman at a dead stand-still, as though wondering what has become of his mistress, and the horses seem to have thoroughly regained their emotional equilibrium. Besides, you will not wish to keep grandpapa waiting at luncheon. If all goes well with Polly's undertaking, as I hope, expect a secret message from me before dusk."

He held out both his hands, and she placed hers within their parting clasp.

"And you?" she inquired.

"Oh, in the mean time, you mean?"

"Yes."

"I shall keep as dark as possible till I can receive the countess's report. You notice that I have made a considerable change in my appearance? Well, perhaps I shall manage to slip back into my room for yet other alterations in this regard, though of course I shan't venture home for lunch. All will depend. Good-by, my darling, my brave Glad!"

The nurse-girl already alluded to was so near by this time, that nothing more demonstrative than the hand-clasp at parting could be indulged in.

Wellborn watched the retreat of Gladys's graceful figure until he saw her enter her carriage, and then turned away.

"A girl of a million—a treasure!" he muttered to himself. "It is well for her gilt-edged select set that there are few like her, or it wouldn't hold together a fortnight, spite of all the unwritten society edicts this side of Tophet!"

CHAPTER XXX.

A WOMAN OF THE WORLD.

THE detective made his lunch at a modest restaurant not far from the Park, and then proceeded directly to the adventuress's hotel, but only to receive word, which she had left for him with the Count von Ratecatchers, as you might say, to the effect that she was gone on important business, but would expect to see him at five o'clock.

He was then strolling meditatively through a neighboring street, with no particular object in view but to kill time until that hour should arrive, though of course with no little result as to what it might bring forth, when Lady Bannington's victoria dashed by on its way home from the morning's drive.

She was now alone, having doubtless dropped her recent escort at his club, and, after gazing at Wellborn curiously, she recognized him, and nodded with a smile.

The detective gravely lifted his hat, and then, remembering that her ladyship's residence was not far away, he hastily turned into an adjoining street.

But he was, nevertheless, overtaken by a foot-boy wearing the lady's livery before he had more than half traversed the block.

"Mr. Wellborn, sir?" pantingly queried the menial, respectfully touching his hat.

Mark nodded a little crustily.

"Her ladyship Lady Bannington's compliments, Mr. Wellborn, and can't you make it convenient to call on her at once? I am to say that she particularly requests it."

Mark hesitated, and then accompanied the boy.

Lady Bannington, who was a very energetic woman, had already changed her driving for an indoor costume, and advanced smilingly to meet him as soon as he was ushered into her reception-room.

"Thank you for coming, Mr. Wellborn!" she exclaimed, with her accustomed frank heartiness, while conducting him to a seat by the cozy grate fire. "You see, Ran—I mean Mr. Challoner, of course," with an unaffected blush—"and I lunched at the Brunswick, before I got rid of him at his club door, and then, when my eyes alighted on you long enough to establish your identity, I couldn't resist the temptation to command you hither."

She was looking unusually bright and happy, though while talking she had kept her eyes upon him with renewed interest it would seem.

"Of course," responded the detective, with his usual ease and urbanity, "your ladyship's merest wish must ever be equivalent to a command with me. But why do you watch me still so narrowly," smiling. "Can't you get over my partial disguise, as yet?"

"Yes; that isn't it. But really, Mr. Wellborn, for an out and out dead man," laughing, "you are about as healthy and unforbidding a specimen as I know of. Don't look cut up, please! Though Ran—Mr. Challoner told me your secret, it shall go no further."

"Ran was to impart it to no one," said Wellborn, discontentedly.

"Wait," she smiled, yet more happily; "perhaps you will forgive him for my sake. Mr. Wellborn, I know your discretion. What if I should give you a secret of mine in amends?"

The Society Detective possessed himself of one of her ladyship's plump little hands, and raised it reverently to his lips.

"If you mean," he exclaimed, heartily, "as I divine you do, 'that you are going to marry the rascal, I shall at least congratulate him at the first opportunity, for I honestly believe that you will be the making of him, if nothing else will.'"

She was vastly pleased, her happiness revealing itself in every change of color in her soft cheeks, every scintillation of her dark eyes and every quiver of her full, mobile lips till it actually seemed that her first youth was coming back to her, though she was comely enough in her ripeness without the transformation.

"Yes, yes, you have divined it!" she exclaimed. "And can't I afford to be care-free? Fortunately, I know Ran's faults no less than his virtues, and not to love him the less because knowing the first-named to be so much in the excess. It all came about in my victoria to-day, soon after our witnessing Gladys's accident. Ah, you rogue! and it was your appointment with her, too. Ran told me. Yes, it all came about so beautifully, so naturally. But I hope no one will be so good-natured as to say that I took him out driving with the express hymeneal purpose in view. What do you think? However, let them say what they will! I am happy, and so is Ran. And if I am a few months, perhaps, his senior—don't you dare to laugh at me, Mr. Wellborn! Ha, ha, ha! why shouldn't our sex have the advantage, occasionally, where a disparity exists, as well as yours. Who complains when a man marries a girl young enough to be his granddaughter? And yet, forsooth, let a woman still in the first youth of her heart, if not of her years—"

"And still as charming and pretty and fascinating as ever she was," gallantly interrupted her companion, catching something of the contagion of her joyous spirits; "yes, yes, why shouldn't she, Lady Bannington? So say I, and if any one of Ran's friends ventures to say anything less truthful or less complimentary in my presence, it will be at his peril!"

She blushed more rosily than ever, her black eyes sparkling.

"La, Mr. Wellborn, what a perfect little gentleman you are!" she cried. "Really, if I were not a newly-engaged woman, I would kiss you on the spot!"

"Spare it for lucky Ran!" interposed Mark. "I can enjoy the salute in my imagination, and he is not such a fool as not to want all that you can give."

"Thank you! But bless me! here am I rattling along like a music-box, without remembering one of the chief things for which I commanded

you to my presence so unceremoniously. Mr. Wellborn, you may have divined that"—for the first time she hesitated a little—"that I have been troubled lest an obstacle might present itself to the happiness that I am now enjoying in the prospective."

"I know all about it," replied the detective, bluntly. "Let me hope that it has been effectually removed."

"You know all about it?"

"Yes."

"How did you know?"

"My own penetration."

"You are just a lovely liar, Mr. Wellborn!" with another laugh. "Polly Buxton gave it away, and you need not deny it."

"I don't intend to."

"But it is no matter. Since Mistress Alias no longer waves a wand over me, she shall be made to feel my reprisal sooner or later."

"No, no, Lady Bannington; or I really hope not. Polly is at present doing a good service for me—or, at least, I think and trust she is—and I really wish that she might escape your serious displeasure."

"Ah, Ran gave me a hint as to what you were expecting of her. Well, well, I am so happy a queen that all prison doors shall be flung open. She is pardoned."

"That is really good of you!"

"But of course," with a slight frown, "no more of her masquerading in bediamonded high society under baronial or other false colors."

"Not to be thought of! Set your mind at rest as to that."

"Good! Now as to the feared obstacle which I have so long confronted. Read that."

She handed him a foreign letter.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A SURPRISE.

THE letter was from Lady Bannington's London solicitors.

It briefly informed her of the death of her divorced husband, Sir Archibald Bannington, baronet, while lion-hunting in the heart of Africa, eighteen months previous to date, though the news was but newly arrived in England; and concluded with a sentence, discreetly masked, in which her ladyship was inferentially congratulated on being once more a free woman under the law.

Wellborn's only immediate comment was to return the missive with a smile, and to once more raise the pretty hand to his lips.

"What do you think of it?" she asked, her breast heaving somewhat though her eyes continued to sparkle. "No need of my pretending an unhappiness that I don't feel—do you think so?"

"Certainly not. Eighteen months dead! and who is to know that you haven't known of it almost from the first?"

"Thank you, Mr. Wellborn. That is just how I think, and just how I am going to act." And then she suddenly burst out with a stormy impulsiveness that was almost tearful, and was a sufficient betrayal of the ardent warmth of her nature. "He was never a good husband to me, Mr. Wellborn! Though I let him get the divorce against me by default, it was not that I had been guilty of anything he charged, but merely through my indifference and disdain for his meanness. That is the truth, on my womanly honor!"

Mark gravely held up his hand, in protest against her speaking of her private affairs, but she met him with a passionate gesture, and would have none of it.

"No, no!" she went on, "I feel impelled to speak, and I must, Mr. Wellborn; for you are a man in whose good opinion I am anxious to stand well and uprightly!"

Polly Buxton—though hardly to be mentioned in the same breath with such a woman as her ladyship—had declared much the same thing. And it was perhaps but little wonder that Mark Wellborn, with his accustomed modesty, should fall to puzzling over the whys and wherefores of two such women—both keen, clever women of the world, however widely separated in character—being so desirous of standing well in the good opinion of such a plain, unpretentious and inconsequent fellow as he regarded himself.

But perhaps he would have had to pursue his queries no further than his sweetheart, Gladys Challoner, to arrive at a certain degree of enlightenment, whether he would concur therein or not.

"Sir Archibald did not know how to treat a woman decently or considerately!" Lady Bannington ran on hurriedly. "They are all alike, or nearly all—the men, even those calling themselves gentlemen—in my country, though I am unpatriotic enough to say it. And he was an Englishman of Englishmen in that respect—one of their typical old stock country gentlemen," her quivering lip curled—"a sort of 'curled Assyrian bull,' as Tennyson has it! The wife of such a man, however refined, and sensitive, and pure spirited, is just 'something better than his dog, a little dearer than his horse'—and often, let me tell you without exaggeration, not even a bit better or dearer either. A thorough lady in such a man's possession is just his possession, and no more. She is as much of a mystery to

him as would be the delicate mechanism of a watch or a spectroscope in the hands of a South Sea Island savage; and in one case as in the other the mystery is summarily disposed of by a grind under the heel or smashing it with a club. But Sir Archibald Bannington, though he might know a great deal about hunting down tigers and elephants, found out his mistake when he tried to hunt down me! Once, when I refused to let him toss up my baby—happily now with the angels!—like a cup and ball in his hands because he was too drunk to stand straight—once, I say, he struck me with his fist, and, as God is my judge, if I had had a weapon to my hand—"

She came to a sudden stop, through the very violence of her passionate recollections; and then, looking at her auditor with a pallid, wondering face and wild eyes, as if hardly realizing where she was, she broke into an hysterical laugh, which ended in a burst of tears.

It was over like a gust, though, even while he was doing his best to soothe her apparently inconsolable fury of memorial wrongs, and in a few minutes her new happiness was once more in undivided sway over her strangely emotional being.

"What will you think of my miserable, my stupid, my indefensible outburst, Mr. Wellborn?" she cried, laughing nervously, while holding out her hand at parting. "You especially, with whom I wanted to stand so well. Say that you will forget it all!"

"But forget what? Forget that your ladyship is the strangest, the best, the most charming, the most incomprehensible of women?" And, raising her hand once more to his lips, he was gone.

"I do believe," muttered the Society Detective, on gaining the street, "and I'd be willing to take my oath to it, that womankind is the most varied, absolute, multifarious and altogether sphinxian mystery in all the universe?"

He had remained at her ladyship's longer than he had intended, and at once quickened his pace.

As he approached an avenue corner, newsboys were hawking the second edition of the evening papers along the more frequented thoroughfare.

Mixed as they were with the jingling of horse-car bells and other street sounds, he paid no attention to their vociferated cataloguing of the news at first, but at last one of the announcements smote upon his hearing and understanding like a blow.

"Here you are! Great mystery and tragedy of the—Athletic Club! One member kills another in a friendly fencing bout! Mr. Mark Wellborn the victim! No police notification yet—no funeral—friends of victim keeping the matter quiet! Here you are!" etc., etc.

"Here, boy! let me have one of those papers. Never mind the change."

Then Wellborn halted in a store entrance, his eyes upon the tell-tale page.

There it was at last in staring head-lines, with the leaded matter following! Lord Tressillian's impatience had got the better of him at last, and all New York was sharing in the fiction that continued to hoax him.

CHAPTER XXXII.

POLLY'S PROMISE.

AT first the detective was filled with mortification and chagrin.

Then, on weighing the matter more calmly, he began to think better of it, until he gradually decided that Tressillian had still further put his foot in it, as the saying goes, by securing the publication of the thing, as he doubtless had, and that the situation was just to the same extent improved in his, the detective's, favor.

True, it was galling enough to have his name—and it was a good, solid old name, too, that of Wellborn, reaching far and worthily back in his country's history—mixed up as the principal, and a dead principal at that, in such a cheap and baseless fabrication. But then there was nothing in its mention really to his disadvantage, Tressillian's was no less prominent, and his lordship would really become the butt of the town when the bubble should be pricked, to the release of its gaseous puffing, as it would have to be in short order.

In the mean time, might not the most be made of the extraordinary situation in more ways than one?

A man generally supposed to be dead, if one comes to study it over, has more advantages for his self-enlightenment than might be supposed.

It is not only that he can read or hear his obituaries in the tongues of his friends and his enemies, and plainer, more naked truths and heart-exposures in the abstract than would have been likely to come to his living recognition.

Masked by the invisibility of his lost identity, so to speak, he becomes a phantom in the surging but calculable armies of the living.

He, now of the infinite, innumerable myriads of the dead, in comparison with which the hosts of the materially quick are but as a little handful, an inconsequent baker's dozen on the bosom of the earth, is an unseen presence before which hypocrisy unsuspectingly drops its multifarious

mask, an ear into which no whispers are guarded, a sentient existence that feels but is not felt, that thrills but is not thrilled, that knows but is unknown, a subtle, permeating but uncomprehended being, such as the warmth of the sun, the intuitions of life, the electric principle, the essence of things!

It was with this sense of isolation, but of exceptional power, that the Society Detective now felt himself so strangely endowed, and, after the primary shock of its novelty, he felt bound to acknowledge to himself that the sensation was neither terrifying nor disagreeable.

However, his immediate business was with such of the privileged living who still knew him as one of themselves.

He glanced at his watch.

Five o'clock!

He lost not another moment in hurrying to the adventuress's hotel.

Already familiar with the number of her suite, he made no inquiry at the office, but taking it for granted that Polly would by this time, her appointed hour, have returned, he ascended to the third floor, on which her rooms were located, not by the elevator, but by the staircase, which landed him at the extreme rear of the building, a much greater distance from her apartments, which were street-fronting ones.

He did so with a fast-beating heart, so intense was his suspense as to what she might have in store for him—exultation or disappointment, which might it be?

While threading the long corridor, however, and when in the proximity of the desired door—a cautious and secretive "Hist!" such as one might make awatch in the dark for an anticipated housebreaker or a surreptitious rodent, caused him to pause inquiringly.

Then his arm was grasped by the little rat-catcher of a pseudo-German count, and he was softly dragged into a room opposite to those of the adventuress, out of whose half-open door the little old man had noiselessly darted to intercept him.

Polly's father placed his finger across his lips, and owlishly indicated the closed door of his daughter's parlor.

"What's up?" whispered the detective, impatiently. "Let me know! Do you take me for a warehouse rat, that you're so mysterious about it?"

Mr. Hoodman, otherwise the Count Von Hohenstauffer, only blinked his twinkling little eyes, shook his terrier-like little head, and again pointed to the opposite door.

Before Wellborn could get any worse natured over his mysterious detention, there was a movement of its knob, and he instinctively stepped back with his companion out of sight.

Then the opposite door opened to afford egress for a man, who at once hurried off along the corridor, with a set, preoccupied face, and was closed again.

That man was Pinchet, young Challoner's rascally valet, who had continued to remain in his employment, notwithstanding the hints that had been proffered as to his untrustworthiness, doubtless inasmuch as he was otherwise an exceptionally valuable body-servant.

Count Von Hohenstauffer now released his pinch upon the detective's arm, which had somehow suggested the closing wire noose of a mouse-trap, or a clutching nab on a rat's neck, and, with a wriggling contortion that was doubtless meant for a bow inherent to the courtiers of the Prussian court, smilingly indicated that the audience chamber of fraulein the countess was now accessible.

Polly opened at the first knock, and received the detective with both hands extended, which, even apart from her beaming smile, were a sufficient indication of success.

"Come in!" she exclaimed, locking the door as he entered, though not without a parting sign in her illustrious progenitor's direction. "I was so fearful that fellow might see you, and thus nullify your secret, for I read the account in the newspaper a few minutes ago. Aha!" laughing; "some one is destined for a guying when the hoax is at an end, but it won't be you?"

"I opine that you have been successful?" were the detective's first words, while discarding his hat and overcoat. "Assure me on that point first, Polly."

"Yes," she replied, exultingly, "and more so than you looked for."

"Good! good! Ha! you have the written history?"

"Yes, and more, too, I tell you!"

She was now seated opposite him before the sparkling grate-fire, and had evidently not long returned, as her blonde cheeks were still a little flushed and her blue eyes bright, as from outdoor exercise, while her pretty yellow hair was yet a little disordered from the confinement of the elegant little bonnet carelessly lying on the center-table.

"More, too?" repeated her visitor.

"Yes; I have purloined not only his lordship's written confession of the true facts in that falsely-styled elopement case, but something besides."

"What is that?"

"His lordship's regular diary, kept pretty

regularly for years past and almost up to the present day, fully corroborating, or authenticating, as you might say, the confession itself."

Wellborn could not repress a joyful exclamation.

"Quick, Polly!" he exclaimed, somewhat feverishly; "let me have them."

"No, I sha'n't!" decisively. "At least, not till you have heard the story of my success. 'Quick, let me have it' and without a preliminary word of thanks or gratitude. But all men are moral pigs more or less, anyway!"

Though she was laughing, he saw that she felt secretly hurt, and hastened to make amends for the discourtesy into which his impatience had betrayed him.

But, though easily placated, Polly was bent on relating the story of her enterprise before surrendering the points of it, and he therefore contented himself perforce in as gracious a mood as he could master for the reception of what she had to say.

This, however, proved far more interesting than might have been expected.

"Well," she began, "I suppose you will acknowledge, Mr. Wellborn, that it was not a bad stroke, my securing his lordship's diary, in addition to the mere history you were anticipating?"

"Indeed, I do, Polly!" Mark replied. "Otherwise, the only proof of the authenticity of the narrative, should he see fit to repudiate it, would be merely in the handwriting."

"I am glad you think so, for, still in corroboration, I have got something even better than the diary."

"Oho! and what may that be?"

"A witness."

"A witness?"

"Ye—Pinchet!"

"What! he was in Tressillian's services so many years ago, then?"

"Yes."

"And you have got his promise to bear witness to the history's veracity."

"His promise? Pough! the promise of such a French rascal! My friend, I have him nailed! Better than that, I have got him thus!"

She made the downward motion of the thumb so significant the world over.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE ADVENTURESS'S STORY.

THE detective nodded and smiled.

"How did you persuade the knave into your net?" he asked, curiously.

Polly laughed to the revelation of her magnificent teeth, and shrugged her shapely shoulders.

"Persuade! Bah!" she cried. "I ordered—commanded him hither from where I unexpectedly found him. He came like a Breton sheep."

"And where did you unexpectedly chance upon him?"

"You couldn't guess in a year, my friend."

"I don't believe I could."

"In my lord's hotel apartment."

"What?"

"The truth, my friend! Could a luckier coincidence have chanced in my luck?"

"Perhaps not. What was the fellow doing there?"

"Seeing what he could steal."

"But this is very extraordinary. Better give me the whole story connectedly, Polly, and at once."

"Such is my intention. But have a little patience, my dear."

She rose in her brisk, energetic way—which somehow always suggested to Wellborn the equally energetic but more refined activity of the woman whom he could not help imagining in some sort as the blonde adventuress's brunette prototype, Lady Bannington—snatched the bonnet from the table and disappeared into the adjoining sleeping apartment, quickly reappearing with a hotel salver containing a decanter and glasses.

"No!" she archly queried, setting down her festive burden, while the detective smilingly shook his head with a declinatory gesture.

"You'll excuse my selfishness then, I hope? and here is any amount of good future to you, Mr. Wellborn!"

Then, airily tossing off a delicate glassful of the liquor, she as airily lighted a cigarette from a package that she produced from the bosom of her dress by a suggestively rapid movement of her light-fingered shapely hand, and resumed her seat with an air of much comfort and quiet satisfaction.

"To begin at the beginning, my friend," she said. "you may not know why I have consented to throw such an old business associate over in your interest, and apparently with so little commiseration?"

"You shake your head and frown a little. What! you may care still less than you know, eh? Well, I am going to tell you, at all events; and I shall expect from you the strictest and most outwardly earnest attention, at least, to everything I say."

Wellborn pulled a rather discontented face. But time did not particularly press, it being not yet later than half-past five, and as Polly was likely, with a pretty woman's privilege, to take

her own time in telling her own story, he wisely held his peace.

"I shall tell you why," she repeated, reflectively. "It isn't that I have come to particularly dislike his lordship personally, you must understand. It isn't that I couldn't forgive him, perhaps, for going back on me in that engagement with the Gayeties that I was to have on his assurance. Neither has he ever swindled me more than modestly in our diamond transactions. Moreover, it isn't through any inordinate and overwhelming admiration that I have conceived for yourself, my friend," with her flashing, but artificial, smile. "No, I like you, and you were indulgent to me when you might readily have been the reverse—but that is all. But it is," with sudden temper, "because his lordship insists on selfishly having that big pig-brained brute, Bill Buxton, as his hanger-on, irrespective of my protests, and of what possible annoyance his presence on this side of the pond may at any time subject me to."

She struck the table with her hand, but quickly recovered her good-humor with a smile, to add:

"That is it, and just one other consideration, Mr. Wellborn, which you will learn later on."

"Now to my operations of to-day. I first made my appearance at the Brunswick a little before noon, but only to learn from one of the maids, who happens to be a little friend of mine—it is always well to have a little friend on hand, Mr. Wellborn, for there is no telling when such a thing may prove useful—that his lordship was in his room, in company with Mr. Weymouth, having but recently returned from his ride."

"Why hadn't I gone in the morning, when he was pretty sure to be taking his canter in the Park, after his old-time Rotten Row custom? My friend, never choose the forenoon for going through another person's apartment, flat-rooms, hotel quarters, or anything of that sort. It is the chambermaid's period, some one or other else is bound to be around, the locality isn't fairly settled down for the day, and it is unsafe on general principles. Never try it on."

"Yes, yes; it isn't likely that I shall ever make the essay!" exclaimed the detective, a little hastily. "Do try, on your own part, to get along a little livelier with your yarn, Polly."

Then her clear laugh, rippling out merrily as she tilted out another glass of cordial and lighted a fresh cigarette, apprised him that she wasn't hesitating to guay him a little.

"Besides that," she went on, "his lordship's friend and pitcher, Mr. Weymouth, is apt to be in the desired apartment almost at any hour in the forenoon, looking after his lordship's wardrobe."

"What!" interrupted Mark, "is the fellow no less Tressillian's lackey than his follower?"

"Something of the sort. They were friends on more equal terms in my own recollection—in fact, I have heard that Weymouth was originally the richer and more important of the pair. But it takes an Englishman to branch from friend to bully as worldly circumstances are gradually reversed, and yet another Englishman to submit to the deterioration without grumbling—as a sort of matter of fact, you understand. You Americans are more independent, but infinitely less to my liking, from a business point of view, because so much less easily fleeced. You see, Mr. Wellborn," with a sip at her glass between puffs, "that I am making no reservations with you."

"Humph!"

"Exactly. I knew you would feel highly complimented. Well, I returned to the hotel soon after the mid-day meal, and with better success. My convenient little friend informed me that Tressillian had quitted the place, with Weymouth, in a cab, with an appearance of remaining away several hours."

"I had his lordship's duplicate key, as you are aware. Now his lordship can't be in the best feather nowadays. Maybe he is making love to faro or roulette more than is good for him, or beyond his capacity of cheating the dealers, or maybe Bully Bill has been hammered a little more than he could hammer in the scientific contests for which his patron has been backing him with more patriotic enthusiasm than cold judgment. At all events, his lordship's present quarters at the Brunswick are rather unpretentious than stately. They consist, to be more particular, of a sitting-room, with alcove sleeping-bunk, on the sixth floor back, with the servants' quarters in rather undignified proximity."

"All went well, my friend. There is a certain art in fitting a key noiselessly to a lock, as perhaps you may conjecture. It's also a truth, strange as it may seem, that I slipped into that room, closing and bolting the door behind me, as if there were nothing novel for me in such a proceeding whatever."

"All neat and orderly. Nothing of the bachelor carelessness naturally looked for in such a place. Mr. Weymouth's painstaking hands, no less than the chambermaid's, doubtless, betraying themselves everywhere."

"All silent, too, indicating plain and uninterupted sailing—that is, at first. Then a slight, stealthy movement behind the lowered curtain of the alcove compartment. I took but one pre-

liminary peep, then quietly drew my revolver, and threw back the entire drapery. "Bon jour, my little Monsieur Pinchet," I remarked, in my usually calm and melodious tones. "Sorry to disturb you, but you will at once step out and explain yourself, or be inoculated with lead through the medium of explosive force."

"He came, without waiting for a second request, and—ah, my friend, a sly and cunning rogue, the Frenchman!—with an injured expression of inquiry that it was good to see through to the cowardice that was behind it."

"What!" he says, grinning like a Cheshire cheese; "it is his lordship's pretty barmaid friend of the other years?"

"Why do I find you here, my little man?" I demanded, with the requisite amount of virtuous indignation, as you may well believe.

"You did not know, then," he replied, elevating his eyebrows, "that I am again in his lordship's service?"

"Drop that!" I said, "or I hand you over! You're young Mr. Challoner's man, and I know it; and you haven't been his lordship's since he drubbed you at Versailles for stealing and pawn-ing his hunting-whip with the emerald in its stalk. Own up, or I ring for the office detective and hand you over like a hot muffin at breakfast service!"

"My friend, I hope you will credit me with the *finesse* I deserve in this complicated matter. Nothing more was needed to bring the rascal to his marrowbones, and to loosen such a jargon of protestations and entreaties from his tongue as would make you think it to hang more loosely in his head than a stray button in an empty work-box."

"What did you expect to find between his lordship's bed-mattresses?" I demanded, for he had been thus employed when brought up standing by my fearless interposition in the interest of law and good morals.

"Money," the scoundrel admitted. "Mr. Challoner is niggardly with me since he began to suspect my honesty, and his lordship has been in arrears with my wages to the amount of sixteen shillings for twelve years back."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE PRIZED PAPERS AT LAST.

At this juncture Polly burst into a fit of immoderate laughter over the recollection of the valet's explanations.

"This, mind you, Mr. Wellborn," she cried, "a twelve-year-old debt—arrears of wages, sixteen shillings, due him from Lord Tressillian for twelve years!"

"Come, my man," said I, beginning to lose patience at last; "drop your lying and come to the point in short order, or it will be the worse for you. You are still in his lordship's secret pay, as I know very well, to keep watch in the Challoner household."

"He accordingly acknowledged everything. It was the merest chance that I had caught him in the place, with which he was altogether unfamiliar, looking for what he might pick up—the unconscionable fellow!"

"But why had he been so directly at work between the mattresses?—for he had evidently only just begun operations on my surprising him. He explained it by saying that it had been Tressillian's habit to secrete large sums of money thus in former days."

"Did you come across anything?" I demanded.

"Not a soul!" he replied, with unmitigated disgust. "His lordship's luck must have indeed changed when he can no longer hide away anything but an old coat, with some papers of yellowish writing in its pocket."

"I gave a start. 'Go out of this room,' I ordered, 'and wait patiently for me in the corridor.' He obeyed. I at once secured from between the mattresses the old coat alluded to. It was evidently in occasional use as a chamber-coat, in lieu of a wrapper. The pages of yellowed writing in its pocket were the abduction history you so much desire to secure."

The detective, who had been expecting something of the kind, started forward, holding out his hand.

"A few moments more!" said Polly. "Having made this discovery, I chanced upon his lordship's diary by a no less lucky chance."

"While slipping out from the alcove, after returning the coat, minus the papers, to its hiding-place, my skirts caught upon something projecting over the edge of a table in the sitting-room, bringing it off and down on the floor with a noise that for the moment brought my heart in my throat."

"However, no alarm was caused by the slight crash, and I was once more cool and on the alert."

"The object I had accidentally thrown down proved to be his lordship's traveling-desk, or writing-case."

"The fall had broken it open, and among the contents exposed to view was a little red book, with the word 'Diary' and his initials in faded gilt on its cover."

"I glanced back through the dates till I found

what I wanted, and then secured it to keep company with the loose pages of writing."

"Then to set things to rights and slip out of the room as agreeably as I had entered it was another moment's work, and the thing was more of a success than I had hoped."

"Pinchet had obediently stood on guard. On second thoughts, I brought him home with me, and questioned him closely."

"The upshot of it is that he remembers perfectly the circumstances of Tressillian's part in the Ostend feature of the so-called elopement affair, his lordship's remorseful offer to assist the unfortunate lady, a furious breach that he had with Peyton over the miserable business, his threat to the latter to write out a true statement of the circumstances in the lady's exoneration, together with many other things that may of be use in authenticating the written account, all of which are at your disposal for a consideration of one hundred dollars."

"I then let him go, after duly impressing on his mind the necessity of good faith and secrecy in a manner that he was not likely to disregard."

"There you are, Mr. Wellborn, and here," producing the diary and papers from a sort of secret shelf under the center table, "here are the results on sight. Now you see," with her clear laugh, "it would have been impossible for me to let you have these things without telling you my story first, for then you would not have had the patience to listen to it. A woman's way, my friend!"

Wellborn's examination of these precious acquisitions was soon completed.

"Nothing could be better!" he exclaimed. "Polly, you have acted like a trump card in the whole affair. There will be no difficulty about securing Pinchet's testimony at the price you name. But what can sufficiently compensate or reward you? You are not accustomed to working for nothing," with a smile.

"No, I am not," she frankly admitted.

He had already got on his overcoat, and, with the prizes secured on his person, stood before her, hat in hand.

"Time is precious now, Polly. The final work must doubtless be done to-night. So tell me what you expect at once; or shall you prefer to think it over?"

"No need of that, Mr. Wellborn," there was a singular, half-hesitant look in the big blue eyes now; "I've had my wished-for reward in my mind from the very first—that is, solely in the event of your complete success, through this instrumentality of mine, you understand."

"Yes; what is it you would ask, Polly?"

"You'll be likely to think it everlastingly impudent," she hesitated—"not to say brazen?"

"I'll be likely to think nothing of it at all till I know what it is."

"This: That you"—looking at him wistfully—"bring your Gladys here with you, and let me take her in my arms and kiss her—just once!"

Mark stared, and then gave a short laugh.

"You must be jesting!"

"Ah, there you go!" reddening painfully—yes, painfully, though he wouldn't have imagined it possible in her a moment before.

"But I might have known that you would be scandalized at such a request."

"Scandalized? Hold on, Polly; you're jumping at conclusions," and he suddenly seized both her hands, filled with a profound sympathy for the woman, the yearning motive of whose request he now began to understand. "There is nothing to be scandalized at, and I don't believe that Miss Challoner will think so, either." Polly's eyes brightened. "But you must have something more to demand than such a trifling request as this."

"Trifling!" Her whole face was momentarily transfigured now. "My God, Mr. Wellborn! if you could know what it is to be a woman such as I—bad, hardened, desperate, lost, defiant! at war with the world, and the world at war with you—society's curse, and yet society's dread—with your own purity and innocence no more existent than the echo of a death-bell chime that has passed away on the winds of irretrievable years—and then to dream of the delight, the ecstasy, the heaven's taste of once more—but once, once more, before the black gulfs wash you down forever—receiving the willing embrace of a pure and beautiful girl, and feeling the fragrance of her kiss mingle with the curse and poison of your own breath—"

But she could say no more—the words having thus far leaped disconnectedly but torrent-like forth, as though the more passionate inarticulations of her madly heaving bosom—and paused, panting and pale.

"Enough, my poor friend!" said the Society Detective, more moved than he would have liked to confess. "Compose yourself, and believe, pray, that I understand and sympathize with you."

She stretched out her hands helplessly, and he took them again in his.

"You really think that she will come?" she faltered; that—that she will let me?"

"By Heaven, yes! I'll answer for it, Polly!" though he had his doubts, nevertheless, as to Gladys's consent. "Yes, yes; bear up, try to

be a better woman—there is still your saving chance on the stage, most likely—and God bless you!"

And, with a last pressure of her hands, he was gone.

CHAPTER XXXV.

RAPID WORK.

WHILE hurrying down the stairs, the detective glanced at his watch.

Six o'clock, and past!

Much, much was to be crowded into brief space, if this night were to end what he had so plotted and striven for, and rapid, all but breathless action would be required.

As a first step, he called a cab, and was forthwith whirled into the vicinity of the Challoner residence, for it would not do to trust to a messenger—he must run his chances of getting a secret word with Gladys.

Fortune favored him in the shape of Aunt Betsey Warder, whom he saw just about to enter the house as he approached the stoop.

"Miss Gladys will just about be descending to dinner," she said, when the urgency of the case was presented to her. "But I will manage it for you, sir. Wait for her here in the vestibule."

A moment later, Gladys came out to him.

"All is well," exclaimed Mark, seizing her hand. "I have but little more than a breath of time now. Just tell me, dearest, if Tressillian will confer again with your grandfather to-night?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Between eight and nine."

"Have you persuaded Randolph to remain at home?"

"He has promised."

"Good-by! Later on you shall know all."

A parting kiss, a fleeting embrace, and he was off again.

"To the —," he exclaimed to the cabman, while springing into the vehicle, which had been posted just around the street corner.

"All right, your Honor!" prompt as the crack of the whip that accompanied the words.

The horse was a good one, for a wonder, and fairly burned the road under his feet, as the French say.

The office of a prominent morning newspaper, which we shall call the *Spreader*, had been named.

In good season it was reached.

Mounting hurriedly to the editorial rooms, Mark was so fortunate as to find the city editor still in his den.

This was an exceptionally wide-awake ex-reporter, named Smelters, with whom the detective was well acquainted, and favorably so, from having frequently put him on the track of exclusive society news items.

"Ah, Mr. Wellborn!" with a welcoming smile; "how are you? I hope your haste of manner means something racy for the *Spreader*."

"It does," Mark was at once seated at the editor's elbow. "A social sensation, and exclusively for the *Spreader*, if it can be put in type immediately."

"Good! What is it?"

"You remember the so-called Challoner-Peyton English elopement and divorce case of years ago?"

Smelters was justly considered a sort of animated encyclopædia by his associates.

"Perfectly," after a slight pause. "Lord Tressillian was mixed up in it. But hold on!" and the editor began to laugh.

"What's the matter?"

"You ought to be dead! However, I suspected it for a hoax at the second glance."

"You're right there. A hoax. As to the elopement story, here is Tressillian's own account of the affair, placing the lady in a perfectly different and honorable light. You have my word as to its authenticity. Will the revival of the affair be interesting?" anxiously.

"Interesting?" Smelters was already scanning the manuscript, which had been laid before him. "I should say so! Better than that—a sensation!"

"Will much alteration or rewriting be required?"

"None whatever. Humph! A wonderful story, and with the impress of being *bona fide*! Head-lines and a dozen lines of introduction are all that are required."

He dipped his pen in the ink, and began to write them at once with marvelous readiness and celerity.

"I must have a first proof inside of twenty minutes," interposed the detective.

"You shall have it in less."

Smelters had already converted the manuscript into "copy."

He crammed it into the slide-box, pulled the rope, and signaled the composing-room foreman, who at once responded as the box went rattling and flying up through the wall.

"Copy!" he bawled through the speaking-tube.

"Marked, 'haste.' Proof waited for."

"Fifteen minutes!" came down the reply.

"By the way," observed Wellborn, "the manuscript ought to be preserved."

"It shall be done."

The editor then resumed some other work that was before him as if wholly unconscious of the detective's existence.

Prompt to the moment, however, Mark hurried out of the den with the long galley-proofs in his possession.

He had dismissed his cab, and now hastened to take the Elevated Railway for his boarding-house, as being the most expeditious way of reaching it; for his next and indispensable precaution, before seeking the Challoner house, was to forestall the possibility of Mrs. Le Duke giving away prematurely the fact of his continued existence to Weymouth.

The boarders were at dinner as he noiselessly admitted himself in at the front entrance, and thence skipped, unperceived, up to his room.

As he was entering the latter, however, a stifled scream, accompanied by a terrified exclamation behind, caused him to turn.

Norah, the housemaid, who had chanced to be passing through the passage, stood transfixed, her blue Irish eyes almost popping out of her head.

Comprehending her terror, Mark had her by both hands in an instant, and was pouring his reassurances of his not being a ghost; but a still living and very animated little gentleman, into the girl's understanding, like grist into the hopper of a mill.

She came around slowly, but satisfactorily.

"We all thought you dead, sir!" she exclaimed. "The paper said so. The boarders be talking of nothing else at table this blissed minute."

"And Mrs. Le Duke?"

"They looked for her to faint dead away, sir, but she didn't at all, at all! One w'd have thought she'd have known ye to be dead a month, and not to have cared a snap for your Honor when living, from the aise with which she tuk the blow. She's that fickle that I'm ashamed of her, sir. There's that oily-tongued Sassenach Englishman, Mr. Weymouth—"

"Good Lord!" interrupted Mark; "he is not at dinner with the rest, I hope?"

"No, sir, not so bad as that quite yet; though he comes here to board to-morrow. But to think of the madame having already gone out drivin' with him in the Park, an' your handsome self still cowl'd in your coffin, skewered with an army toasting-fork!"

"Norah, Norah, it is all right! Fetch Mrs. Le Duke up here to me this instant—or rather, get word to her secretly, and here is a nice present for you. Remember, you're to give away my secret to no other living soul."

The girl darted away, as though fairly winged by the hard dollar that had been slipped into her hand.

A moment or two later, Mrs. Le Duke came sweeping and sailing into the detective's room with the voluminousness of a sea-serpent and the majesty of a tragedy-queen.

"I knew it was a fiction, Mr. Wellborn," was her loftily greeting words. "I saw through the deception at once."

"Of course, my dear lady," replied Mark, seizing her by both hands with unusual warmth. "you must have done so with your accustomed penetration—to say nothing of your having seen me alive after the time I should have been dead, according to the ridiculous story. But tell me this, does Mr. Weymouth also know it?"

Mrs. LeDuke's grand manner was already softening—he had addressed her as "my dear lady," with perhaps "my dear duchess" yet to be heard from.

"He does not," she replied, lowering her eyes, and affecting no little emotional disturbance.

Mark drew a long breath of relief.

"My dear duchess!"—there it was at last—he said, very softly; "I saw you out driving with the distinguished Englishman this morning."

She looked up, blushing, or trying hard to do so, while wondering that no reproachfulness accompanied the announcement.

"Yes," he murmured, "but do not think I am going to repine, my dear duchess. No, I perceive that your heart is already in that distinguished gentleman's keeping. May you be happy, ma'am!"

"Don't be in such haste, Mr. Wellborn—Mark!" faltered the other, with an impulsive movement as if threatening to engulf him in her colossal embrace. "True, Mr. Weymouth is agreeable—it may be that he is already favorably impressed with my charms—but a woman's heart is a strange, strange thing, Mr. Wellborn. It might be that a single word from you, a single endearment—" she broke off with a melting look, and a tremor of agitation that was meant to be pathetically expressive.

"No, I must crush back my own feelings—I cannot think of interfering!" the Society Detective assumed an air of agonizing but heroic self-abnegation. "Thus to step in between you and your brilliant prospects as that gentleman's bride—not to be thought of, nor dreamed of!"

He released her hands, and set his foot down resolutely.

The widow was too much surprised to be disappointed.

"Is Mr. Weymouth really so distinguished, though, Mr. Wellborn?" she asked.

"What! have you not heard that he is of royal blood?"

"Good heavens! no, Mr. Wellborn, I have not."

"Well—er—neither have I. But then his constant and intimate association with Lord Tressillian—the unconscious bauteur and princeliness of the gentleman's manner—"

"Ah, he is all that! One cannot help being impressed with—with a certain something in Mr. Weymouth's manner and bearing."

"True, true; and—" with a beaming "God-bless-you-my-dear" look—"could he fail to be impressed, in his turn, by a certain queenliness of bearing, allied to a pronounced majesty of beauty, that I needn't go three steps to find the personification of, as the fit companionship of his royal qualities? Ah, madam! if a wellborn must resign you, it is some consolation for him to know it is only to a royal-born (or what is much the same thing, no doubt) that he consents to yield you up!"

Mrs. Le Duke was visibly affected. In fact, her high, proud look, tempered with a tearful wistfulness, was so much for her that she sunk into the one easy-chair of the apartment with her accustomed predilection and a faint, satisfied smile.

"One parting favor now, my dear duchess!" exclaimed Mark, with renewed impressiveness—"perhaps the last signal one you shall ever be called upon to grant my humble self."

"Mr. Wellborn," replied the widow, "I shall never forget—that is consistently with my duty to another—how agreeable and gentlemanly you have ever been to me. What is it you wish?"

"Silence as to the fictitiousness of this hoaxing story as to my death—absolute secrecy till the whole thing is authoritatively exposed."

Then the fair—or rather, brunette—widow became very curious, and perhaps but naturally so.

She had, fortunately, thus far preserved her erst favorite boarder's secret—yes, even from the fascinating Mr. Weymouth, of the blood-royal, and would continue to do so, even though expecting another visit from the new charmer that very evening—but what could be the additional secret of this anxiety to have the death-secret, so to speak, remain a mystery?

Mark managed to satisfy her after a fashion, and then hurried away, by no means fully assured, but with her parting promise to continued secrecy in his possession, for what it might be worth.

It had all been rapid work, but he arrived at the Challoner residence before Tressillian had yet put in an appearance.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE LIBRARY PORTIERE AGAIN.

GLADYS CHALLONER had been on the anxious lookout for her lover's coming at the window of the little reception-room, so that he was admitted therein without attracting the attention of the domestics.

Much to his satisfaction, Randolph Challoner also advanced to meet him with extended hand, as the young girl conducted him into the apartment, securing the door behind her.

"Ah!" exclaimed the detective, grasping the extended hand, "this is something like, old fellow. But, in the first place, let me congratulate you with all my heart!"

"For what?" cried Gladys, looking from one to the other in surprise.

Dan had colored up, though not with ill-nature.

Mark laughed, and then bit his lip.

"Hallo!" he said. "I thought you must have surely told Glad."

"You can do it for me, then, since you seem to know all about it," and Ran also laughed, though a little sheepishly, while resuming his seat by the fire, and lighting a fresh cigar. "Hang it all! but then I suppose you've seen Julia?"

Wellborn then briefly sketched his commanded interview with her ladyship, and the hymeneal revelation as its outcome, which we may be sure lost nothing of its cheerfulness in the telling.

Gladys remained a little dazed at first, for she might have thought it more natural to come to think of Lady Bannington as an aunt-in-law, were such a thing possible, than as a sister-in-law. But, for all that, her ladyship was one of her prime favorites, and she lost no time in giving her brother the kiss of congratulation, and saying such words as she knew would be most pleasing to his self-esteem.

"It's odd to think of you thinking of marriage, Ran, but I feel sure you will be happy," she said, simply. "Lady Bannington is so brilliant and beautiful that I can readily forgive her winning such a masculine treasure as you are, even if I half lose a brother by her selection."

This put the young man in a self-satisfied good-humor with himself forthwith, and he began to brighten up amazingly.

"Now to our business in hand!" observed Wellborn at last, with his accustomed quiet energy. "Everything is in readiness for the enemy—indeed, I may say that we are not only

at our guns, but double-shotted in the bargain. And Ran, my boy, the most encouraging sign of all is to see you with us, body and soul."

"Yes," replied young Challoner, with some embarrassment. "You see, I talked the matter over with Julia, and—and—" he looked up a little helplessly.

"Let me help you out, old fellow. And—she told you that the only right and honorable course was to stand by the vindication of your mother's memory at all hazards. Eh?"

"Yes," Ran admitted, "only she put it to me a good deal stronger than that."

"So far, so well!" said the Society Detective, drawing up more closely to his companions, so that, as seated, they formed a deliberative group of three. "Now let me tell you what I have accomplished, and with what preparations we are in readiness to meet his plotting lordship."

He accordingly did so clearly, though in the fewest possible words, and concluded by producing the proof-sheets of Tressillian's story of the old so-called elopement, together with his lordship's diary, which he opened at the back pages that confirmed the latter's erstwhile remorseful sentiments on the subject, together with his being even then engaged, at the dates of writing, upon the true story of the vile and systematized deception that had been practiced by Lieutenant Peyton upon the innocent and unsuspecting wife, with his own complicity therein, with the possibly ultimate intention of giving it to the world, as the only honorable amends left him toward relieving his conscience and righting the wronged lady's reputation at one and the same time.

At a date in the diary, a year later on, however, there were notes of this virtuous intention having been indefinitely abandoned, though he should continue to keep intact the true account. "In the event of Peyton failing to keep himself in order," whatever that might mean.

But the inference was plain that there had been a violent quarrel between the two men, now permanently healed, it would seem; and that his lordship had been induced to compound matters with his conscience by the reflection that the wronged lady was more than likely beyond the reach of further calumny, through having died of a broken heart, and that no special cause would be served by giving the revived story, in its veracity, to the world.

The irregular entries following, and pertaining to his lordship's private life from that time, covering a period of many years, were merely interesting in portraying his gradual but steadfast moral deterioration in a very marked and lamentable degree. Indeed, a few recent entries, among a hodge-podge of sporting and gaming memoranda, even alluded indirectly to his diamond sales, on behalf of a party variously mentioned as "Her Blonde Sereneness," "H. B. S.," "Polycarpia" and "Blondetta," under which it was easy to perceive that the personality of Polly Buxton, the adventuress was thinly veiled.

Gladys and Randolph read the printed slips at one and the same time, their cheeks close together over the harrowing pages.

When they looked up, the former was very pale and silent, while her brother's pugnacious face was dark with pent-up indignation and fury.

"The scoundrels! the inhuman hounds!" he exclaimed, hoarsely. "To think of our mother, our own mother, being coldly, systematically snared in this way to the blasting of her reputation, the—"

But he could say no more, and, with clinched hands, blazing eyes and heaving chest, wisely abstained from the attempt lest it might end in his pitiable breakdown altogether.

He might have added, self-accusatorily and in simple justice, "And to think of my having been willing to let the old calumniating story hold sway, when this vindication of the suffering angel's purity was first broached to me!" and perhaps something like this crossed the minds of both Gladys and Wellborn at that moment, though they prudently beld their peace.

Here there was a ring heard at the street bell, and the conference of the trio was hastened, inasmuch as it was quite evident that this meant the arrival of Tressillian.

Indeed, a few moments later a message came from old Mr. Challoner requesting the presence of both Randolph and Gladys in the library.

"Say that we will come at once," Randolph announced through the partly open door to the footman who had brought the message.

And then he turned inquiringly to the detective, who had already risen, after repossessing himself of the diary and proof-sheets.

The latter nodded encouragingly.

"It is all right," he said. "I shall take my position behind the portiere forthwith. Let things take their natural course. You will have me put in an appearance at the proper moment. By the way, Ran, where is your valet?"

"Somewhere about the house."

"It would be a good thing to have him within call."

"I'll attend to it."

The detective was accordingly once more

posted in the little off-room behind the *portiere*, and the brother and sister returned to the reception-room, preparatory to complying with their grandfather's request, which was the same as a mandate.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

AUNT BETSEY.

HARDLY had Wellborn been ensconced at his post, however, and before he had had time to peer through the parting of the *portiere* into the adjoining library, where Mr. Challoner and his visitor could already be heard conversing, when he made a somewhat unwelcome discovery.

He once more had a fellow-listener in the person of the white-haired, blue-spectacled housekeeper, Aunt Betsey Warden, who had secreted herself so snugly at the side of the curtain, in much the same spot that Pinchet, the inquisitive valet, had occupied on the former occasion, as to escape attention at first.

She seemed to be looking appealingly at the detective through the dim light, but, irritated at the possibility of his losing something of the conversation it was so important he should overhear in its entirety, he was in no mood for indulging the good woman just then.

He rose noiselessly, sternly signing to her, and she followed him obediently, but with sufficiently obvious reluctance, into the next adjoining and larger reception-room, whose juxtaposition has already been alluded to.

"Do let me see and overhear, sir!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands, and speaking with a strange intensity of appeal, when they were at the door leading into the hall. "Oh, if—if you knew what I have at stake!"

But Wellborn, who was chiefly apprehensive of her making a premature alarm, shook his head imperatively.

"It must not be!" he said, firmly, but kindly. "Yes, I do know, ma'm what is due to you—Gladys has told me. But nothing must be risked; it is indispensable that I should remain on watch alone."

He laid his hand on the door-knob as he spoke, and, with a sad little sigh, Mrs. Warden bowed her head submissively.

Then he hesitated, a sudden thought occurring to him.

It was this: What if Mrs. Le Duke, in her forgetfulness or infatuation, should give away his secret to Weymouth? Might not the latter in that event make post-haste dispatch to inform his principal of the delusion they were under with regard to his (the detective's) death, even to the extent of intruding upon his lordship's conference with old Mr. Challoner to that end?

"Wait, if you please, ma'm!" he placed his hand on the housekeeper's arm. "You may still be of some service in this evening's business, since you are so deeply interested."

She looked at him inquiringly.

"Could you manage to post yourself," he continued, "so as to oversee and if need be intercept any possible interruption from without?"

"Any interruption?" she repeated, slowly. "I don't understand, sir."

Mark enlightened her to the best of his ability, with the brief moment at his disposal.

She seemed pleased at even the secondary trust proposed for her.

"There is the recess at the first stair landing," she said. "I can see the entire hall from there. Neither Mr. Weymouth nor any one else shall come, without my notifying you."

"Good! I will then leave this door unlocked."

After this disposing of the good woman, the Society Detective hastened back to his post of observation.

Fortunately, he had missed nothing by the interruption, Randolph and Gladys having just entered the library as he gained a secret view of the interior.

But old Mr. Challoner seemed unwontedly excited already.

"Glad you have come, my dears!" he cried, while Lord Tressillian arose with a bow to the new-comers. "Glad, my dear, there is a startling bit of news for you, that his lordship has been telling me. But perhaps you have seen the evening papers?"

Gladys, who had maintained an icy composure, as if under great self-restraint, sunk slowly into the chair that Lord Tressillian set out for her.

"If you refer to—to Mr. Wellborn's death, as reported, grandpapa," she said, with a perceptible tremor in her voice, "yes, I have read the account."

Tressillian gave her a swift, self-satisfied glance, she seemed taking the affair so much more easily than he had anticipated.

"Poor Mark!" commented Randolph. "He was a capital fellow, and once regularly one of our set. Strange, too! My lord," addressing himself frankly to Tressillian, whom he now met face to face for the first time since the knock-down of the Red House affair, "you are to be sympathized with scarcely less than the man you seem to have done to death so accidentally—I may say so unprecedentedly—if the story is true."

Tressillian was more than willing, in view of

his hoping to become one of the family, to meet conciliation fully half-way.

"Thank you, Challoner!" he said, with becoming gravity. "But all of my friends seem to feel for me in my extraordinary and painful position. Would to God that any toil, any task, any remorse of mine could call my unfortunate fellow-contestant back to life—to repair this terrible, this hideous result! But words are feeble in such an extremity. I can't understand, however, why you should qualify your words by adding, 'if the story is true.'"

"Of course it's true," interposed Mr. Challoner, quickly. "Isn't there the account of it in the newspaper? And besides, haven't we your word for it, my lord?"

"Certainly," replied the latter.

"Well, then, why should Randolph undertake to doubt it? Why should he know about it more than any one else?"

Lord Tressillian glanced referentially toward young Challoner, who saw too late the slip he had made, while Gladys could not help feeling a little uneasy.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

TRESSILLIAN'S EFFRONTERY.

"I WAS on the spot when the 'accident' occurred, grandfather," Randolph finally admitted, as the best way out of the difficulty, but with a significant emphasis on the word accident. "I should have told you of it before—though I perceive that my name is not mentioned in the printed account."

"Of course you should!" exclaimed the old gentleman, fretfully. "Or I don't know as there was any necessity of it, either. Of course, I feel sorry for the young man, as being the victim of such a mishap, on general principles of humanity. But, as he had long ago stepped down and out of our set, of course I had ceased to have any individual interest in him."

"Oh, grandpapa!" murmured Gladys, flushing with shame, though not for herself.

"Tut, tut, child! don't worry. You should feel, as I do, far more consideration and commiseration, too, for his lordship here, whose position is infinitely more embarrassing than that of—of his unintentional victim in the unhappy affair."

Tressillian made a deprecating gesture, while Gladys said, coldly:

"True, true; I suppose the dead—the stabbed to death," and she gave Tressillian a strange look, "are beyond embarrassment, so far as this world is concerned at least."

"No more, my dear, no more!" cried the old gentleman, yet more impatiently. "What I am trying to get at is this: If Randolph was a witness of the casualty, why does he question the truth of the report?"

Randolph gave his sister a swift look, which she fortunately understood, and which seemed to say: "Follow me; we must make a break somehow." Then drawing a long breath, he replied:

"Well, there hasn't been any funeral that I have heard of. For Mark Wellborn to have been killed, there would have to be a corpse, wouldn't there?"

Mr. Challoner appeared only mystified, while Lord Tressillian looked up quickly, full of unaffected interest.

This was natural enough in the latter, who, while having no doubt of the duel having resulted fatally, was, together with many other club men equally credulous, still puzzled over the fact of the dead body, that should have been forthcoming as the only ghastly feature in the case, being still a matter of mystery.

"What are you raving about, Ran?" exclaimed Mr. Challoner. "You were there, you say? You don't deny that young Wellborn was killed, do you?"

"No, I don't deny it—I'm not denying anything just now, grandfather," replied the young man, slowly.

"Well, then you ought best to know what became of the remains."

"To be sure!" Tressillian couldn't help interposing. "Montaldi gave it out to every one that you took charge of the poor fellow's body, Challoner."

Ran contented himself with shrugging his shoulders, without replying.

"Don't worry, don't worry!" snapped out Mr. Challoner, querulously. "I'm tired of the subject—heavily bored with it! I suppose the coroner will find the remains soon enough, now that the affair is made public. I still can't understand why you, Ran, of all men, should question the truth of the newspaper account—that is all."

Instead of replying further, Ran partly turned to Tressillian with a singular look.

"I presume it is to you, my lord," he observed, with just enough abruptness not to be impolite, "that the newspaper owes its facts in the case?"

"I frankly acknowledge it, sir," replied Tressillian, still puzzled by his implied doubt of what he himself believed in good faith to be nothing but facts. "Such a lamentable occurrence ought to be made public sooner or later, and the sooner the better in my opinion. What fault, may I ask, can you find with the facts—I notice you emphasize the words—as reported."

"I simply question that they are facts at all!"

"What?" cried Tressillian, while Grandpapa Challoner only rubbed his head bewilderedly, and stared.

"I simply mean what I say," continued Randolph, coolly.

Tressillian's astonishment was doubtless sincere, but he kept his temper.

"Indeed!" he observed. "And pray what part of the report do you question?"

The answer caused him to turn pale.

"The whole fiction as to there having been any casualty at all. I believe the trick-foils were selected by you, with the express purpose of murdering my friend, Mark Wellborn!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

PLOT AGAINST PLOT.

TRESSILLIAN sprang to his feet in mingled trepidation and fury.

"Sir! sir!" he exclaimed, hoarsely.

Gladys had also turned pale, while old Mr. Challoner had fairly collapsed in the depths of his great chair, a picture of staring bewilderment and dismay.

"I repeat my charge of foul and murderous treachery on your part, Lord Tressillian," said Randolph, steadily. "The proofs to substantiate it will not be lacking, should occasion require."

"Proofs?" echoed the Englishman, with a blank look.

"Ay, sir! Professor Montaldi's evidence will be quite sufficient." Tressillian visibly winced. "You bribed him to furnish just the sort of murderous trick-foils that were used. He has kept the bribe-money as a curiosity, and will be ready to display it in court—should you ever be brought to trial."

Tressillian, notwithstanding that he had turned ghastly white at first, was quick to recover as he brought his reason to his aid.

Thoroughly believing, as he did, that he had succeeded in slaying the Society Detective in a fair, if masked, fight, his reason repudiated the possibility of Montaldi bearing witness against him to an effect that would also establish him, the fencing-master, as a self-confessed accomplice, both before and after the fact.

Then why those qualifying words, "should you ever be brought to trial," on the part of Randolph Challoner himself in making the heinous charge, if he was really sure of substantiating it?

In fewer words, while still bewildered to a certain degree by the contradictoriness of the young man's innuendoes, Tressillian was yet reasonably sure of his security, and was not going to permit himself to be permanently discomfited by a "bluff," as you might say.

"Sir," said he, resuming his seat with a quiet dignity that did not misbecome him, "the tremendous insult of your outrageous charge is past, and I am no longer startled by its unexpectedness. The preposterousness of your accusation alone remains—to be treated by me with the unmitigated contempt that it deserves. I simply and calmly defy you."

Young Challoner shrugged his athletic shoulders and looked composed.

"Take care that you do not defy me too far, my lord," he said, in a calmly threatening voice, so low as to be hardly audible to any one but Tressillian himself.

"Grandpapa," suddenly interposed Miss Challoner, very firmly.

"Yes, yes, my dear!" mumbled the old gentleman, waking up out of his doze. "What is it, my child—what is it?"

"Haven't you had quite enough of this sort of thing, grandpapa?"

"Yes, yes, to be sure! Why not? That is, of course I have. Violence is always low, my dear—beastly bad form, you know. None of the Challoners have ever been unnecessarily violent—that is, the true Challoners, without any deteriorating intermixture, you must understand."

"Yes, yes; I suppose so. Allow me to ask, then, grandpapa, why you commanded my brother's and my presence here at this interview?"

"Yes, yes, that's it!" He passed his hand wanderingly over his poor foolish old head. "But, deuce take it if I haven't forgot! You tell her, Tressillian—do!"

Tressillian began to look supremely disgusted.

"It was only," he said, "to make the subject of the newspaper report known to Miss Challoner, in case she might have missed reading it, so far as I can recollect, sir."

"No, no; there was something else. What was it? what was it?" And Mr. Challoner still kept rubbing his head, now smiling rapidly, and now again knitting his brows very profoundly.

Gladys gave an alarmed look at her brother. She had never seen her grandfather quite so wandering before, even after his wine at dinner. But Ran only shook his head indifferently—in fact, he had long ceased to care one way or another for the old man's vagaries, absolutely as he was beholden to him—and scarcely responded to her look.

But now Mr. Challoner began to brighten up, though in a flickering, uncertain way.

"Aha, I have it!" he chuckled, wagging his head knowingly. "That is it, Tressillian! I was to tell Gladys off-hand, and with no more nonsense about it, that she must accept you as her betrothed on the spot. That's it. Ha, ha!"

Tressillian looked, as he doubtless felt, vastly mortified.

Gladys, on her part, saw fit to pay no heed to the senile words, but kept regarding the old man yet more earnestly and with increasing alarm.

Ran merely folded his arms, and looked indifferently straight before him, as though laying in patient wait for some longed for opportunity to bring matters to a head, as a cat might lie in wait for a mouse.

Gladys was about to touch his arm, perhaps preparatory to calling his attention more pronouncedly to Mr. Challoner, which was indeed threatening to become unrelievedly pitiable, when the latter suddenly started up with unexpected energy.

"Why don't some of you reply to me? Would you dare treat me with indifference? Would you forget that I am a Challoner? That is it, I say! and who will dare dispute me?"

Tressillian still remained irresolute, having doubtless never dreamed of encountering an embarrassment of this sort.

But Ran, much to his sister's surprise, suddenly rose and marched straight over to his grandfather with a firm and resolved look.

"Come, dear grandpapa!" he said, flinging his arm protectingly, and yet at the same time a little cynically, about the trembling, imbecilely irate old gentleman's shoulders, with a coaxing, indulgent air; "that is right. Speak up for your dignity! No one shall treat you indifferently while Glad and I are here to stand by you."

Glad was puzzled, while Tressillian was yet more embarrassed, inasmuch as he was the very last one against whom the implied charge could be justly made.

Mr. Challoner looked around to his stalwart grandson with sparkling eyes, in which there was no little gratitude.

"Ah, you rogue!" he chuckled; "that reminds me of when you were a boy. Good, Ran, good! it's like old times to see you stand up for me."

"True enough, grandpa!" Ran went on, as if humoring a child. "Now do proceed, please. Lord Tressillian was brought here, or rather Glad was brought to him? And he was to make formal demand for her hand, in the hope that the death of her betrothed lover, Mark Wellborn, was by this long time—say two whole days!—out of sight and out of mind? That was the part object of this conference?"

"Eh? eh? Well, perhaps so, Ranny. Let me see, let me see."

"Oh, this is simply intollerable!" exclaimed Tressillian, indignantly. "Sir, sir!—But, Miss Challoner, I do trust you will not think me such a brute as your brother is so bent on trying to make me out!"

Gladys, her eyes still watching the old gentleman with growing anxiety, did not seem to hear.

Ran was still more deaf.

"That is it, grandpapa," he continued, soothingly. "But in what other way was his lordship to establish his claim for my sister's hand? Come, try to think, try to remember now."

"Ah, Ran!" with a fresh imbecile shake of the head; "but you see I am no longer so young and strong-willed as in former days. The Challoners were ever strong-willed, my boy—powerful-minded, great-willed—it is the glory of the old stock!"

"Yes, yes; but you are wandering a bit, grandpa. Let me help you out. Hadn't his lordship's claim," hesitatingly, "some connection with our mother—Glad's poor mother and mine, you know?"

The old man suddenly flared up, like a swift blaze from smoldering embers into which new tinder and fagots have been thrust.

"That is it!" he all but screamed, casting off the young man's caressing touch. "Curse her, curse her! the family disgrace—the curse of the irreproachable old stock! That is it! Tressillian must not revive the old story—Glad must marry him!"

Randolph stood back a little with folded arms.

CHAPTER XL.

TRESSILLIAN AT BAY.

"So!" exclaimed young Challoner, and he fixed his gaze sternly on Lord Tressillian. "And what may you know of my mother's story, sir?"

Old Mr. Challoner now seemed to be roused into being his old, at least half-resolute self again.

"Nothing; he knows nothing, Ran!" he called out, becoming comparatively alert and energetic again. "That is, he will tell nothing. He has promised it. The festering old story shall rot in oblivion, and Glad must be betrothed to him forthwith."

"Lord Tressillian," continued Randolph, unmoved, "I addressed my question to yourself."

"Oh, indeed; did you?" Tressillian was thoroughly composed now. "Well, sir, the power-

ful-minded head of your illustrious house has answered it for me; I know nothing."

"Nothing?"

"Nothing beyond the generally accepted tale, of course."

"That's it, my lord!" chirped out the old gentleman, rubbing his fluttering hands together.

"You are sticking to the compact bravely. You know nothing, absolutely nothing!"

"By the accepted tale, as you call it," Ran continued, addressing his lordship as though there had been no interruption, "I presume you mean the one old story in vogue that represented our mother in a most dishonorable and disgraceful light?"

"You are reviving the painful subject, not I," was the composed reply.

"Thank you! And you do not know, of your own knowledge, a truer and more charitable story that would place our mother in the light of an unhappy, blameless, entrapped and foully wronged woman?"

"Not he, not he!" again interposed Mr. Challoner, furiously. "Ran, I'll disinherit you, you rascal! His lordship knows nothing more."

"It is true," continued Tressillian, stolidly. "I know nothing more. Why or how should I?"

"Think, my lord! If you should really be capable of righting a wronged lady's memory by an intimate knowledge of facts that would clear her name, and should then withhold this knowledge—"

"I tell you I know nothing!" cried Tressillian, beginning to grow exasperated with the situation. "I simply know of the lady as an eloping woman—as, since you compel me to say it, doubtless deserving the obloquy that has settled upon her memory."

"LIAR!" shouted a terrible voice.

The portiere had swung back, and Wellborn was before them all, like an accusing angel, the proof-sheets in one hand, the filched diary in the other.

Tressillian had fairly bounded from his seat, and shrunk back to the line of curtained bookshelves, where, however, the fleeting superstitious dread was rapidly giving place to humiliation and anger in his face and eyes.

It was not so much that Wellborn was still alive, nor perhaps the exposure of his cold-blooded mendacity, that so completely overwhelmed him.

He might have faced that out, but to have been hoaxed, made a laughing-stock, as he plainly saw must inevitably result—this was what bit to the bone.

"I begin to understand," he said, slowly. "Well—for the present you have the upper hand, Wellborn."

But old Mr. Challoner had also leaped erect, and now much of all the mind and energy he had ever possessed were suddenly returned to him.

"What!" he cried. "Wellborn still alive, eh?"

"Yes, Mr. Challoner," the detective replied for himself, "though it is no fault of that murderous scoundrel yonder that I am not in my coffin, as he has been hoaxed into supposing me. Your grandson's charge as to the duel is correct, Mr. Challoner. Tressillian designed to kill me, and it was only a timely wink from the fencing-master, whom he would have made his accomplice, that saved me from the bloody trap, and has enabled me to thus trick this scoundrel in his turn."

"It is simply false!" retorted Tressillian. "I defy you to prove it."

"Perhaps you will denounce this also as false?" The proof-sheets were flaunted before him.

"What is it?"

"Your manuscript story of Mrs. Challoner's wrongs in printed form—as it will appear tomorrow in the *Spreader*!"

Tressillian started back, at last fairly aghast, for he now recognized the diary, also, as his own.

"You may well be stricken dumb!" exclaimed Wellborn. "There is not only this diary to prove and authenticate the story as your own, but Pinchet stands ready to bear witness as to your remorseful good faith in writing it—in the long ago, when there were probably still some lingering sentiments of honor in your composition, and before you could have become as now—a thief's fence—a professional diamond thief's agent for the disposition of her stolen wares!"

Tressillian had now something of the appearance of a wild boar at bay.

"False! false—preposterously false!" was all he could say, in a hoarse, unnatural voice, while still backing hard against the shelves. "But this shall be answered for!"

Here, however, old Mr. Challoner made a sudden dash for the proof-sheets, but was restrained by his grandson.

"Let me have them!" he weakly screamed. "I see it all. But the story shall never be published. Disgrace enough already!"

Gladys now ran to him.

"But think, dear grandpa!" she cried, throwing her arms beseechingly about him. "Mamma was traduced—entrapped—foully wronged! This story is Lord Tressillian's confession of the

facts that will clear her good name, redeem her memory!"

"I will have none of it!" raved the imbecile. "Her name? She never had any till my son gave her his, and thus disgraced it. Off, both of you! If that foul story is revived, I'll disinherit the pair of you, and cast you as beggars from my doors!"

"Be quiet, you old idiot!" suddenly interposed Tressillian, brushing roughly past him. "As for you two gentlemen," furiously confronting young Challoner and Wellborn on his way to the door, "you will know where to find me, should I not seek you out first. And, as for this old dotard—"

The street-bell had rung without attracting attention, and he was now interrupted by hurried steps approaching the library.

Then the door was abruptly opened, and Weymouth put in an excited appearance.

Wellborn, for one, took in the situation on the instant.

The widow had let out his secret, and here was his lordship's faithful henchman come with the warning, but only to reach the scene with it on the day after the fair.

Weymouth had only time to utter a few words, and then stood astounded at the strange scene that confronted him, when a wild, half-stifled cry behind him caused him to turn.

Then he recoiled into the room, as if before a pursuing specter, though it was only Aunt Betsey Warde that was advancing threateningly upon him.

However, it was she who had uttered the strange cry, and there was something appallingly Nemesis-like in her aspect.

"Henry Peyton!" she cried, still in that wild, half-choking tone. "Villain, traitor! murderer of my husband, no less than of my reputation! what, do I stand face to face with you after all these miserable years?"

She thereupon plucked off her disfiguring spectacles and pushed back her snowy hair, her eyes blazing upon him, while her entire aspect underwent a great change.

Randolph Challoner recognized her, and he also reeled back, with one astounded word on his lips:

"MOTHER!"

But now Weymouth—why had it never occurred to any of them before, the story in his name, H. Peyton-Weymouth?—also found a voice.

"Off, Charlotte, off!" he hoarsely exclaimed, extending his hands repellently toward the woman. "Yes, I wronged you—you were as pure as snow, and even my vile plotting could not sully your white name, which common report took upon itself to blacken thereafter—I confess it! But, good God! I thought you long since dead—I—"

She sprang at his throat, but before she could reach him, she was in the arms of her own son.

"Mother! mother! mother!" was all he could say; and, to the credit of what was sterling and noble in Ran Challoner's nature be it said, he could only sob the words while pressing her to his breast. "Mother! mother! mother!"

Gladys had thus far stood as a statue, seemingly shocked into momentary insensibility.

Then she quitted her grandfather, around whom she had still kept her wreathing arm, and moved a pace or two forward.

Mark supported her, or she might have fallen.

Then her mother found opportunity to stretch out her hands, to her and she, too, was folded to that bereaved and long-empty, long-hungering heart.

Tressillian brushed rudely past the group, and seized his astounded follower by the arm.

"Come!" he buskily growled. "Wasn't there hell enough on hand, without your marplot intermeddling? Away! I stifle!"

He dragged him out of the room, and they disappeared without being molested.

Then old Challoner started up with a sort of frenzied scream.

"Nothing shall be published!" he vaped. "Nothing shall disgrace me further! Out of my house, all of you—Ran, Glad, and you, too, Charlotte, scorpion that you are—out, I say! I cast you off—disinherit you!"

He then collapsed, tumbling back into his chair, rubbing his head and babbling idiotically.

CHAPTER XLI.

PINCHET, THE VALET, MAKES HIMSELF USEFUL.

WELLBORN, after waiting until the physician who had been sent for had come to take charge of old Mr. Challoner, was quietly slipping away from the house, when a light footstep in his wake caused him to turn.

It was young Challoner's valet, Pinchet, who was following him.

"Hallo!" and the detective halted for the man to overtake him. "What do you want, my man?"

"Monsieur Wellborn?"

"Yes."

"Ma'm'zelle Polly perhaps told you that I was to have a hundred dollars, monsieur."

"Yes; when you have earned it, as you will very likely have a chance to do."

"Thanks, monsieur! I wasn't such a fool as to suppose that I would receive the money for nothing. But perhaps I have already done something toward earning it."

"Glad to know it, my man! What have you done?"

"Overheard what passed between his lordship and that other one."

"Ah!"

"Monsieur will perhaps forgive me when I confess to having peeped in upon the domestic scene extraordinary, anticipating that my testimony might be called in at any moment?"

"Humph! that depends."

"I merely tell monsieur this, that he may know why I slipped after his lordship and that other one after they had made their exit from the sensational scene."

"Well, what have you to tell me, Pinchet?"

"His lordship is not wholly despairing. He will, at all events, play a last desperate card."

"What is it?"

"Perhaps monsieur is aware that his lordship has control of a fast yacht, the Wingaway, which he hired last autumn of a rich Boston monsieur?"

Wellborn started.

He had been aware of this, though it now for the first time recurred to him in a long while.

"Ah, I am not ignorant of that. She lies, with other yachts, over at Astoria; but doubtless awaiting repairs and a crew?"

"Monsieur is partly right; but not wholly so. The Wingaway is now in thorough repair, and his lordship intends to put a crew on her this very night through the yachting agent, Monsieur Tarman, in Harlem, I believe."

"Ha! But you are a little out, Pinchet. Tarman's shipping office and residence, are near the Astoria Ferry, in Eighty-sixth street. Well, well! you overheard all this discussed by Tressillian and Weymouth, after their quitting the house yonder?"

"All and a little more, monsieur. They stopped for breath and conference over there under the Park wall. I was quite close to them."

"Well, what else did you gather?"

"That mademoiselle is presently to be abducted—carried off secretly or by violence from her residence—perhaps this very night, or before another sunrise, if the yacht can be got under way in time."

"The deuce! but that would be hardly possible."

"Allow me, monsieur. Everything, or at all events many things, may be possible to a desperate man."

"True. But did you gather what hope might inspire Tressillian to such a mad project?"

"It was something, monsieur, as if he might have argued in this way—though of course they cannot be his exact words—'The old man is a hopeless wreck, and could not disinherit the brother and sister, his grandchildren, if he would. Gladys is still half-heir to his millions, and will doubtless come into possession in a month or two. I shall carry her off with me to the Bermudas, or elsewhere, where she shall be forced to become Lady Tressillian.'"

"Ha! A last desperate card, as you say. Pinchet, you seem to want to do the right thing at last."

"Monsieur, I am a poor man who wants to be remuneratively useful."

"Good! Though I do not think it possible for Tressillian to put his new project in practice at once, it is well to be on the watch."

"Monsieur, I wish to prove my fidelity."

"You have your opportunity out of hand. Return at once to the house, and remain secretly on watch till breakfast time. Do you know where I live?"

"Yes, monsieur, at Madame Le Duke's, but a short distance away."

"Correct. In case of urgency notify me at once. As it is, I am worn out—half-dead for rest and sleep—or I would also watch the house from without."

"Monsieur's word is my law. Shall I also put Monsieur Randolph, my master, on his guard?"

Wellborn reflected, and then answered in the negative.

"Not without immediate cause, at all events," he said. "Both Gladys and he will doubtless have enough to occupy them. They have their lost mother in their arms at last, and, moreover, I suspect that the grandfather's condition is very serious. No; be secret and be alert, that is all; and you shall not go unrewarded."

This conversation had taken place in a retired street nook, within a block of the house.

After the valet had separated from him, Mark consulted his watch.

Half-past ten!

As he marked the hour, a wave of giddiness went over him, and he clutched a railing for support.

Indeed, he was more worn out than even he himself had supposed.

Still, in view of this fresh revelation, no chances were to be risked, and something was yet to be done on his own part.

Remembering that he had not eaten anything since a snatch of lunch at noon, which would alone account for much of his debility, he hurried eastward to Third avenue, and was soon

behind a steaming oyster stew, with an old-fashioned toby of ale at his elbow.

Not a little invigorated by the meal, he next proceeded to the foot of Eighty-sixth street, and somewhat circumspectly approached the house of the yachting-agent, with whom he chanced to be acquainted, and on good terms.

It was well that he exercised a due amount of caution, for as he neared the house, keeping well out of sight, the door of Mr. Tarman's shipping-office in the basement, whose windows were alone lighted up, opened, and Lord Tressillian, accompanied by Weymouth, and followed to the door by the yachting-agent himself, came out.

A few parting words were exchanged with the latter, after which Tressillian and his companion hurriedly entered a close coach that was in waiting at the curb, and were rapidly driven away.

The detective lingered a few moments, and then abruptly entered the office, just as its proprietor was about turning down the gas, preparatory to retiring for the night.

He was a bluff, shrewd, sailorly-looking man of more than middle age, who, after many years as a yacht-master, had made himself well and favorably known as a shipping-agent for supplying yacht-owners with competent officers and crews on short notice.

"Ah, Mr. Wellborn, you?" he exclaimed, shaking hands with his new visitor. "Quite an unexpected pleasure! Bring yourself to an anchor. It's late, and I was about thinking of bunking in up above, but there's still time for a cigar and a chat with an old friend. Take one."

Mark politely declined the proffered cigar, and went directly to the point in stating the object of his visit.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Tarman, when the situation was made clear to him. "I thought his lordship must have something odd in the wind to demand that the Wingaway should be manned and in readiness for sea by sunrise to-morrow, but spike my guns! who could have suspected such a racket as this? One of the Four Hundred to be abducted on the spot, and—the deuce!"

"But," exclaimed Mark, "you surely couldn't comply with his demand on such short notice, and at this unconscionable hour?"

"By jingo! but it just happened that I could and did, though the chance might not present itself again in twenty years."

"I don't see how you could manage it."

"It happened this way: I chanced to have an entire crew—all good men, Americans and with cutter experience—anxiously awaiting berths at a single boarding-house over in Astoria. They lost their last job by the burning of Mr. Bunker's fast cutter Winona a week ago, and are eager for fresh and instant employment. I telegraphed to Spousley, my Astoria agent, and received his reply before his lordship quitted the office. The result is that the Wingaway is doubtless manned at this moment, and will be under way at sunrise of to-morrow, according to agreement. I have yet to secure a sailing-master and mate, but shall be able to do this by exceptional early rising."

"So Tressillian is fully determined to start at sunrise?"

"I shall be on hand to collect my commission before that hour, so you can know whether I take any stock in his determination or not."

"But you will not assist in this desperate enterprise of his, after what I have told you?"

"Not by a long shot, if you shall show me how to take the wind out of his sails!—only I must collect my commissions first."

"That can be arranged. In the mean time, I have a proposal to make."

"I'll bet my binnacle light's it's a good one!"

"That remains to be seen."

"What do you propose, Mr. Wellborn?"

"Ship me as yachting-master. I'll provide my mate, or go without one. You know me as being a fair-to-middling smooth-water sailor."

CHAPTER XLII.

COUNTERING ANOTHER PLOT.

"BETTER than that, Mr. Wellborn," replied the shipping-master, after a reflective pause, during which he seemed to be turning over the detective's rather startling proposition in his mind. "Gad! don't you remember how you helped me out on Colonel Fontaine's yacht off Hatteras, on the home run from Florida, a matter of four years ago?"

"Ah, a stormy time that, Tarman!"

"I should say so! What with the unexpectedness of it—my mate blown off to leeward like a sail-rag, the ladies screaming in the cabin, the colonel and most of his boon companions too drunk to realize their danger, and the big seas coming on the hurricane out of the southeast bigger than mountains, it would have been good-by for the Fearless, with all hands, little and big, rich and poor, man and woman, but for the way one guest sprang to the wheel, and then stood by me till we had weathered the blow—and that man yourself. Better than smooth-water seamanhood for you, Mr. Wellborn!"

"Thanks, awfully, captain. But what of my proposition?"

"Do you mind telling me your object in full, sir?"

"Merely to confront Tressillian with his infamy when well out to sea, relieve his captive of her anxiety, and—circumstances will shape the rest as they may."

"You see, there is this objection, sir. The crew will be shipped in good faith for the voyage."

"Yes."

"And you will doubtless return to port in short order?"

"Yes."

"Well, there you are. I'll have my commissions, it is true, but the men won't have their employment."

"I guarantee to see that they are paid for the entire voyage that they would have made, to a man."

"Still," and the agent continued to hesitate, "the young lady may not be carried off, after all."

"In which case, Lord Tressillian will hardly sail alone."

"True, but—"

The detective interrupted him impatiently.

"Look, you, Captain Tarman," he exclaimed, "I can understand your natural indecision in so exceptional a case. But then I can't stand or sit here hemming and hawing with you all night. You seem to have some personal regard for me."

"I have that, by Jupiter, Mr. Wellborn!" cried Tarman, heartily; "and don't you forget it."

"Thanks! I think, then, a single piece of information will put an end to your indecision in favor of my proposition."

"What is it, my dear sir?"

"The young lady, whose abduction this titled scoundrel is contemplating, is my affianced wife."

"Holy smokes!" roared the agent, grasping his hand. "Not another word, sir! The thing is agreed; there's my hand on it. Come and take a nip with me before you go."

The agreement was accordingly cemented, and some further particulars arranged, over a glass of something that Tarman set out, after which Wellborn, now completely tired out, hastened home to his bed, for it was by this time hard on to midnight.

Having set his alarm-clock for four o'clock, he pulled off his coat and boots, made his bed on the lounge, without removing the remainder of his clothes, and was soon in the deep but troubled sleep that is so often the result of bodily and mental exhaustion.

He awoke, however, before three o'clock, from a hideous dream, in which he had been vainly striving to rescue Gladys from the clutches of Lord Tressillian, assisted by a mob of burly ruffians, who were intent on carrying her into a burning ship that was moored at the verge of a towering iceberg, that was covered with shipwrecked men and women, shriekingly endeavoring to prevent themselves from slipping down the steep pinnacles and gleaming slopes into the flaming gulf below.

Still aching from incomplete rest, he found it impossible to sleep again, and was at the same time filled with incessant and persistent forebodings for Gladys's safety.

These at length grew so tormenting that he could bear them no longer.

He accordingly stripped, and bathed himself with a strong solution of ammonia from head to foot, which, together with the vigorous rubbing down that followed, made him feel like a new man, physically at least.

He then remade his toilette, and was stealthily quitting the house, with the intention of losing no further time in surveying the exterior of the Challoner premises, at all events, and assuring himself of Gladys's safety, when Mrs. Le Duke, looking like a colossal ghost, or Broddingnagian sorceress, in a white wrapper of vast and flowing amplitude, and with her black hair streaming down her back, like a midnight cloud over the shoulders of a snow-clad mountain, interrupted him as he was in the act of opening the street door.

Her room was somewhere back on that floor, and his creaking descent of the lower steps had, brought her out of her lair.

"Mr. Wellborn," she exclaimed, dragging him incontinently into the parlor, "there is no time like the present, unseemly as is the hour. I want to confer with you."

CHAPTER XLIII.

"NO TIME LIKE THE PRESENT."

BUT the Society Detective's long-suffering patience was thoroughly exhausted, so far as this form of annoyance was concerned.

"You're right, ma'm!" he exclaimed, shaking himself free of the woman's leonine clutch almost savagely. "There is no time like the present—for you to return to your room, and cease prying into my actions."

He turned abruptly, but she grabbed him afresh.

"This from you, Mr. Wellborn?" she murmured, reproachfully; "when I was going to this trouble and inconvenience to impart to you a great piece of news as to my future happiness?"

"Out with it then, ma'm, and be done with

it!" cried Mark, trying hard to soften his temper. "I am pressed for time."

"So am I. In the first place, Mr. Wellborn," clasping her hands, "I must crave your forgiveness!"

"It's yours in advance. What do you want it for?"

"I—I let out your secret to Henry last evening!"

"Who on earth is Henry?"

"Mr. Weymouth, to be sure."

"Ah, I am aware you did! However, no great harm was done."

"Oh, I rejoice at that! Mr. Wellborn, we are engaged."

"You don't mean to say you are going to marry the man?"

"Yes, yes; I am to be his."

He knew her well able to take care of herself against any and all marital odds, but, he also recollected many kindnesses she had done him, and was filled with pity for her accordingly.

"Think over it, ma'm, not only twice, but a hundred times!" he cried. "You have this on my disinterested word of honor: If you marry that man, you will marry the most cowardly, unconscionable, contemptible, unmitigated hound and villain that is unhanged on the top of this earth at the present moment!"

He then made his escape, without waiting to see the effect of his savage but well-meant words.

In making his arrangement with Tarman, Mark hardly thought that he would be compelled to put his yachting undertaking into practice, because he could not bring himself to deeming it likely, if barely possible, that Gladys could be in any real danger from this last mad plot on the part of Tressillian, daring and reckless as he knew him to be.

But his doubts were soon put to an end.

As he turned into the street in which the Challoner residence was situated, it being then not quite four o'clock, and a long hour before daybreak at that season of the year, a shot rung out on the darkness.

It was followed by yet another, and as he started up the street a close coach was driven past him at a headlong speed, while he simultaneously collided with the burly figure of a flying man, which sent him reeling and breathless for the moment.

When he recovered both coach and runner had disappeared, so he continued on his way toward the house.

"Hallo!" shouted Ran Challoner's voice from an upper window.

"It is I, Ran!" cried Mark, in response.

"What is the matter?"

"An attempted burglary, I think," was the reply. "At all events, I heard a shot below, together with a groan in my valet's voice. Then I fired at a big man near the street door, and I think I pinked him. I'll come down at once."

Mark bounded up the stoop, to find the door already unfastened.

As he called out again, and entered the hall, he stumbled over a huge, yielding object stretched partly across the threshold.

Ran, assisted by the footman and coachman, was already lighting up the gas here and there, while the female domestics were making themselves heard.

Lying half-way down the stairs, was the body of Pinchet, the French valet, motionless, and with a sinister but brave look on his dark face, shot through the heart.

At the door was the body of the scoundrel that Mark had stumbled over on entering, in its hand the revolver whose bullet had doubtless deprived the valet of existence, a round hole in the middle of the forehead showing where Ran's random shot in the dark had struck home.

No need to more than partly turn over the brutish, ruffianly face to recognize the owner.

Polly Buxton's bruiser husband had gone to his last account no less than, and almost simultaneously with, the valet who had been faithful to his trust at the last, howsoever unprincipled and dishonest he might have been up to a brief period heretofore.

"Here come the police," said the detective, quickly taking Challoner to one side. "Have them remove that body (pointing to the dead ruffian) at least without delay, even if you have to pay them handsomely for making quick work."

"What's the hurry?" asked Ran, not comprehending. "Better search the house first, though I don't believe any robbery was really effected."

Another whisper, however, made him aware that it was the body of his mother's brother, and consequently of his own uncle.

The policemen, three in number, received their notification prompted by this fact, on their making their appearance, and both bodies were accordingly borne away.

But, before this was done, Mark had hurried up-stairs with young Challoner.

"Which is Gladys's room?" he demanded.

Ran indicated the door, with no little surprise. "It was not burglary, but abduction, that was attempted!" exclaimed Wellborn. "Go in, and see if your sister is in her room."

Ran lost not an instant in obeying. A moment later he reappeared at the door, with consternation written in his face, and signed the detective to enter.

"Gone!" was all he could say.

And yet, though the apartment was tenantless, the bed had not been occupied.

Mark returned to the door and called in Justine, Gladys's maid, from among the domestics who were running or clustering about the passages.

The girl had no explanation to offer for her young mistress's disappearance.

Gladys had separated from her mother at eleven o'clock on the preceding night, the maid herself having then attended the whilom housekeeper to her accustomed quarters in the remote rear of the third story. Then, returning, she had found her mistress lying on the lounge reading a novel, after having exchanged her evening dress for a chamber-wrapper. The maid opined that she had thus fallen asleep without undressing or seeking her couch as was occasionally her custom.

Mark signed Ran to let him take charge of the affair, and then turning to the girl, whose discretion was well known, he said:

"Your mistress is missing, but you are to say nothing of it. In the mean time run to the housekeeper's room—I mean to Mrs. Challoner's room—and see if she has remained undisturbed through this turmoil."

CHAPTER XLIV.

CUTTING OUT THE NEW WORK.

DURING the girl's absence on her errand, brief as it was, Wellborn contrived to enlighten Ran pretty thoroughly as to the new situation.

It stood now in about this way: Tressillian, perhaps with Weymouth's or other competent assistance, had succeeded in carrying Gladys out of the house, probably after first throwing her into insensibility, and into the close carriage, a moment or two before the first shot had alarmed the household. She would be conveyed on board the Wingaway before there could be much hope of interception. Therefore, the best thing to be done was to keep the fact of the abduction a secret, which task might be safely intrusted to Mrs. Challoner and the French maid, while Ran should accompany the detective in his original plan of shipping on the yacht in disguise, the last named in the capacity of chief officer, and the other as his first mate. The crew, being honest Americans, could be depended on for doing the right thing, and neither the detective nor his associate would need to have much intercourse with Tressillian till the open sea was reached, when Gladys could be released and they would take matters in their own hands.

"It's a go!" cried young Challoner, slapping his thigh. "What a head you've got for details, Mark! By Jupiter! then at last"—his face and eyes blazed—"Tressillian shall be your man, and Weymouth or Peyton, curse him! shall be mine!"

The maid returned to say that Mrs. Challoner was still sound asleep.

The secret was then left in Justine's keeping, to be shared later on with the ex-housekeeper, and, something like order having been restored throughout the house, Mark accompanied Ran to the latter's room that they might complete their hurried preparations in cutting out the new work that was in hand.

Fortunately, Ran was also not without nautical experience.

"How is it with your grandfather?" the detective thought of inquiring at last.

"Mind a complete wreck," was the reply.

"The physician gives no hope of his recovery, but thinks he may linger along indefinitely. Mother will nurse him."

"Your mother!"

"Yes. It does seem odd that she, of all suffering, misused women in the world, should come to that, doesn't it? But there is no gauging her goodness; and we must make sure work of this counterplot, old fellow. She will be in an agony till we can bring Glad back to her."

"We have the game in our hands," said Wellborn, quietly, "if we only play it right."

He materially assisted Ran in his nautical dress and in effecting certain radical changes in his facial appearance, as he had already done in his own case.

In less than half an hour they quitted the house and made a bee line for the Astoria Ferry, where they found Captain Tarman in readiness with a sail-boat to put them on board the Wingaway.

It was now within half an hour of sunrise, and clear and cold, the dawn already fast brightening in the east.

On the way across the river, Tarman, who had also had a slight previous acquaintance with young Challoner, informed them of Lord Tressillian having gone on over in the first early morning ferry-boat about an hour before.

He had nodded to Tarman (who had even then been on hand looking out for his anticipated arrivals) from the window of a close coach in a

hurried way as he was being driven on board of the boat. And, from the description he gave of the equipage, together with the general suggestion of haste and secrecy that went along with it, there could not be much of a doubt that the kidnapped young lady, probably in an insensible condition, was the companion of his flight.

The heavens became somewhat overcast in the east before the yacht was quite reached at her place of anchorage, so that the daylight was still uncertain, notwithstanding that it was within a brief space of sunrise.

"So much the better for a first introduction," observed Tarman, with a nod toward his passengers. "And," glancing toward the eastern sky, "a blow in prospect, too, if those mare's tails mean anything."

The Wingaway was a beautiful schooner-yacht of about ninety tons, and she rode at her anchor, lightly dipping up and down in the eddying swash of the outgoing tide, like a captive sea-bird with folded wings, but longing to be free for a flight out into the limitless beyond of the watery main.

As Tarman and his passengers clambered lightly over the low, lying gunwale, leaving a man in charge of the sail-boat, Tressillian, who was impatiently pacing the deck aft, stepped eagerly forward.

"Come at last!" he exclaimed, with an air of relief, addressing himself, particularly to the shipping-agent, while scarcely more than glancing at his companions. "I was half afraid you would disappoint me."

"Never went back on my word in my born days, my lord!" was the agent's hearty rejoinder. "Somewhat beforehand as it is, Lord Tressillian, this is Captain Brown whom I have brought you for a sailing-master, and here is Mr. Jones, who will be his second, in command. Both of 'em sailors from keel to truck, and it's hoping that you'll find everything ship-shape and satisfactory."

"No doubt, no doubt!" peering hurriedly through the dim light into the faces of the two men thus unceremoniously introduced. "Up anchor at once, Captain Brown, if you please! I am enough of a yachtsman to know that this breeze from the northwest is our opportunity, with the Bermudas as our destination. A hearty welcome to both of you. Now, Mr. Tarman, at your service."

Mark at once bawled out: "Up anchor!" in a voice as harsh as a foghorn with a frog in his throat. "Mr. Jones" bustled forward, and the no less hastily shipped crew bestirred themselves while Tressillian stepped abaft the wheel to pay the agent his commission charges.

Five minutes later Tarman had dropped astern in his cat-boat, waving his hat in adieu, anchor had been shipped, and the gallant little craft, sheeting out her main and fore courses like mighty and dazzling plumage to the singing breeze, was slipping down with the tide.

"You'll have all but exclusive charge, Mr. Brown," observed his lordship, pausing at the head of the companionway. "If all the same, you and your mate can sign with me later on."

"Many thanks to your lordship!" huskily growled the counterfeit sea-dog of a sailing-master, bringing his hand to the brim of his tarpaulin. "Me and my mate is satisfied, your Honor!"

Tressillian then went below, with the same hurried and pre-occupied air that had been remarked in him from the first.

"A little flurried still, eh?" said the pretended mate, in a guarded voice, coming aft.

"He'll be all right when we've passed the Hook, no doubt," replied Mark. "Naturally a little nervous just now, of course."

"But look here, Mark," uneasily, "I don't see a sign of that devil, Weymouth, as yet."

"He'll be apt to remain below, may be, being still so early, with this chill in the air. However"—he paused.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Ran, black disappointment rushing into his face; "you were about to suggest that the scoundrel mightn't be on board?"

"Well, yes. It only just occurs to me that Tressillian might not have any further use for him, you know."

Ran ground out a curse.

"By heaven!" he growled; "it wouldn't be the fair thing—it would be a mean dastard shame?"

"What would?"

"What! Why, that you should have your man at your mercy, while I—"

Ran could only conclude with a fresh curse upon such a possibility, and then went forward again.

CHAPTER XLV.

UNEXPECTED ENDINGS.

By the time the Wingaway was flying through the Narrows with every sail set and every stitch drawing, breakfast was being served fore and aft.

The man who had been selected as cook was competent, the stores proved to be of excellent quality, and Lord Tressillian, on making a brief re-appearance on deck, had seemed greatly de-

lighted on being informed by his sailing-master that he and his mate would prefer not to intrude upon the cabin fare, but to take their meals forward with the men, as had mostly been their custom.

"I don't mind saying, Mr. Brown," observed his lordship, "that your determination in this regard is particularly agreeable to me. I have two lady passengers below, one of whom is greatly out of sorts, and my steward and I will have about all we can do to look after them. What will the weather be? A blow, eh?" He glanced around the sky.

"Very likely, my lord, and more than a capful at that."

"So much the better!" Tressillian rubbed his hands, and seemed already fast recovering his dare-devil air as the dancing, half-angry waters of the lower bay heaved ahead. "Hump on everything she can stand, no matter how hard it blows. A quick run and a merry one is to my liking!"

Here the steward came to say that breakfast was served, and his lordship again went below.

Two lady passengers! What could that mean?

In talking it over with his mate, after they had breakfasted with the men in the fore-castle, both young men were not a little non-plussed.

It now seemed quite evident that Weymouth was not on board, but who could be Gladys's companion "passenger", or captive, as the case might be?

"It must be some woman Tressillian has brought along as his captive's maid and companion," Ran suggested at last. "He couldn't well have avoided doing something of the sort in common consideration for her position."

"But where would there have been time for him to select such a woman and make the necessary arrangements with her?" demanded Mark.

Ran shook his head, and they were both as far from a solution of the mystery as at the first.

It is the unexpected that happens, however, and the enigma was presently unraveled for them in a most surprising way.

They were well off Sandy Hook, without his lordship having again appeared on deck, when Mark, who was pacing the little quarter deck with Ran, and occasionally pausing for a glimpse of the binnacle, or a word with the man at the wheel, heard his name called out softly from the companion, and in a voice that caused him to wheel in his tracks with the rapidity of a humming top.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed, scarcely believing his eyes, while young Challoner was equally astounded; "it's Polly!"

She beckoned him impatiently, and after a few words of hurried explanation, disappeared.

"To think," exclaimed the detective, coming back to his companion, "of Tressillian having driven so far out of his way down-town, in the midst of his flight, with Gladys insensible on his hands, to have Polly accompany him as her attendant! And yet that is just what he did do."

"But the adventuress had betrayed him to you," said Ran. "And, apart from that, I shouldn't have thought she would have accompanied him."

"Polly says that he pleaded with her like a maniac, and even brought her down out of her hotel to look at Gladys lying insensible in the coach. That, she says, determined her, notwithstanding the unconscionably short notice afforded her. She snatched up a few things, left some directions for her father, and accompanied him forthwith."

"Humph! If there was time for that, there was also time to give the alarm, and have the abduction nipped in the bud."

"Undoubtedly. But the daring and hurricane nature of the adventure would have had its own charm for Polly, and she would certainly have had no chance for sober deliberation. Come, come, Ran; let us rather rejoice that the thing is just as it is."

Ran finally agreed that Polly's enforced companionship was an excellent thing in mitigation of Gladys's position.

Tressillian only reappeared briefly to smoke a cigar, and take note that they were fairly outside the Hook, seemingly altogether unconcerned at the way the yacht was driving and pitching over the great Atlantic swells, or to be secretly jubilant, and then he again went down below.

In the mean time, however, the blow increased into a half-gale, so that it was only under her half-reefed mainsail, with the jib half-unbent, that the Wingaway could be trusted among the heavy seas.

Finally, at about noon, Tressillian came up the companion with no little difficulty, but looking complacent and satisfied still.

But at the first glance that he cast around, a look, first of consternation, then of fury, rushed into his face.

The yacht had been brought about, and was making back for land—almost hull-down but still fairly visible on the horizon line to the northwest—on her starboard tack, with Bermuda-ways directly aft.

"What is the meaning of this?" he roared,

rushing up with an oath to where his sailing-master and master's-mate were calmly awaiting the anticipated outburst near the binnacle, while the sailor at the wheel looked up with an expectant grin. "Curse you, Mr. Brown! what have you brought the ship about for?"

"Because, curse you, Lord Tressillian!" was the equally roared response; "this farce is about played out, and you are nipped in your own trap. That is what it means!"

Both he and Ran had torn off their tarpaulins at the same instant, and, as Tressillian recognized their identity, he staggered back, all but foaming at the mouth, catching at one of the stays and thus keeping himself still erect on the swaying deck by the merest chance.

The next moment, however, he had recovered sufficiently to methodize his fury to a certain degree.

"Mutiny, by Heaven!" he shouted. "Here, men! aft with you to do my bidding on this pair of—"

He had turned to summon the crew to his aid, but came to a sudden stop, with a blank, defeated look in his purpled face.

Such of the crew as were not active in the management of the craft were facing him calmly in line amidships, with folded arms and stolid looks, whose significance there was no mistaking.

In fact, they had been fully primed as to the true situation of affairs, and had consented to a man to the return to port, on young Challoner's assurance that their wages for the entire voyage as contemplated should be promptly paid.

Tressillian drew his hand over his face, looked around him in a dazed, desperate way, and then started for the companion.

But the Society Detective sternly interposed, his hand suggestively upon his hip pocket.

"No, sir!" he exclaimed. "You go not below again. And just as soon as the vessel is more quiet, you can regard me as yours!" with a significant gesture.

His lordship glared, and then, with a nod, seated himself on a coil of rope amidships starboard, without another word.

CHAPTER XLVI.

FINISHING UP.

MARK WELLBORN then signed to Ran, and lost no more time in darting down into the cabin saloon.

Both Gladys and Polly were there, the latter almost her old self, though still pale and nervous from her recent prostration (she had been thrown into insensibility by chloroform,) and yet under her companion's ministering care.

"Mark, my lover!" she cried, starting up, and falling into his arms. "Polly has told me all. Thank God, you are come!"

Mark embraced her tenderly, and in a few words related the details of his successful counterplot.

"Trust the Waltzing Detective for heading off a blundering British hornpipe of villainy at any time!" cried Polly Buxton, clapping her hands. "And Mr. Wellborn, I have claimed and received already that reward I was so anxious about."

"Let me see: what was that, Polly?" asked the detective.

"What, your memory is so short?" she replied, gayly. "Why, my desire of clasping your bonny sweetheart in my arms, and kissing her roundly, of course! And it was even willingly granted, in the bargain."

"Oh!"

"Yes," murmured Gladys, holding out her hand. "And Polly is going to be a good and honest woman in the future. She has promised it, and I am to help her all I can."

But here there was such a lurch of the vessel that all of them were nearly overthrown.

"The blow is increasing," said Mark. "Remain here, both of you, and don't think of going on deck."

As he himself made his way back up the companion, a perilous condition of affairs was presented.

The cutter, storming along with her mainsail yet closer clewed in, and her trysail boom well on her quarter, had already shipped a big wave over her starboard bow, which had set the fore-deck raffle afloat, a tremendously high sea was chasing her up into the gale's teeth, and though she was quick and true to her steering-gear, the ocean around and the sky overhead were menacing to the last degree.

"It's pretty tough," observed young Challoner, after Mark had intimated to him the satisfactory situation of affairs below, "but I fancy the craft is equal to it, though she strains not a little."

They were both holding on by the main shrouds to avoid being upset by the pitch and roll of the decks, which were like the rearing and plunging of a frenzied steed, when Lord Tressillian, who had calmly lighted a cigar, made his way see-sawingly, but without support, to where they were standing.

"Of course," he said, in a set, cold way that was sufficiently indicative of the desperation to

which his reckless and daring spirit was at last reduced, "I understand that my game is up, gentlemen, and that the final jack-pot is irretrievably in your hands. But you, Mr. Wellborn," addressing himself particularly to the detective, a bold, fighting light suddenly breaking through his somberness, "I understood as implying that a certain personal satisfaction might be agreeable, and—"

He was interrupted by the yacht making a sudden plunge, while at the same instant the man at the wheel yelled out: "Hold hard, all! here's the devil's own sea aboard us!"

Then there was a swash, a roar, the decks were fairly buried under the sea that was shipped, and when they shook themselves free of it at last, Lord Tressillian was nowhere to be seen.

Indeed, both Mark and Ran had only saved themselves from going overboard by hanging on to the stay with a drowning clutch, while there wasn't a sailor on deck but was drenched, besides being out of breath from the weight of brine that had swept over them in a clean sweep fore and aft.

"Did you see anything of his lordship?" Mark asked of the man who was lashed to the wheel.

The fellow gripped the spokes with one hand, and pointed to leeward far over the stormy sea with the other, nodding significantly.

"Gone!" was all he said; and that was enough.

It was as if Tressillian had been a Jonah-curse on board.

At all events, the storm began to sensibly abate soon after it became definitely certain that he had disappeared forever.

However, enough of it remained hanging on to compel a long run out to sea, and it was not till the afternoon of the following day that a return was effected into the calm waters of New York Harbor.

Our story has drawn to a close.

Randolph and Gladys returned to their home to find that old Mr. Challoner had breathed his last on the preceding night.

On Wellborn's part, something of a melancholy surprise was also awaiting him on his return to his boarding-house.

The romantic Mrs. Le Duke was in a most unhappy plight.

She had made a clandestine marriage with Mr. H. Peyton Weymouth on the morning of the preceding day, and it was now beyond question that he was off for Antwerp with one thousand dollars of her savings-bank fund, all the cash she had in the world, which she had foolishly intrusted to his keeping.

A year later it was learned that this scoundrel had been shot dead while endeavoring to escape from a French prison, where he was under heavy sentence for a forgery.

Thus both Tressillian and his follower met their doom at the hands of an avenging Providence.

Randolph and Gladys inherited their grandfather's immense wealth, and, a few months later, there was a brilliant double wedding among the Four Hundred, at which Mark Wellborn and Lady Bannington were, as a matter of course, the other contracting individuals in the hymeneal festivities.

Both marriages have been singularly felicitous, as perhaps they deserved to be.

The long-suffering but vindicated mother of Gladys and Randolph is now living with her daughter in the Challoner residence, and enjoying something of the after-math of that life-harvest which was little short of death in life for her.

It was the relative of her husband's, with whom she had found a temporary asylum after her crowning misfortune, who had died, after which, on that good woman's dying advice, the mother had taken the dead woman's name, and thus become a secret inmate of her father-in-law's house.

Polly Buxton really has reformed her life, permanently it is hoped, and is, at the present, a prominent and prosperous light of the burlesque stage.

Mrs. Le Duke is at her old stand, making and saving money afresh, and, it is hoped, with her gushing and romantic disposition becomingly tempered by experience.

THE END.

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